

You're the Hero Of Light, Charlie Brown

by Tiger lover 16

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Summary: When the evil denisen of Darkness, the dreaded Dark Witch, escapes from her prison she sets about to build an army of villains to conquer the realm of light, and shroud all worlds in eternal darkness! Charlie Brown is made the new guardian of the light, and tasked with uniting fictions greatest heroes in an epic war to defend their worlds. Can you say "Good grief"? CBxPP and more.

1. Prologue

****Tiger Lover 16:** Hello people. This is an idea I've had for a very long time, but I wasn't so sure how to write it. Recently I've come up with a lot of good ideas for how the story should go, and I think I'll just go with it. Just so you know not to worry I'm still working on my chapters for "It's the Philosopher's Stone, Charlie Brown" And "You're Amazing, Charlie Brown" and that, despite my unforgivable failure to update in so long, I'll have the next chapter for at least one of them up before Halloween, and both will be updated before the end of November. So terribly sorry for the lack of updates. There's a lot more I want to say, but I'll save that for the authors note at the end. For now, enjoy this nice little preview of what will become my BIGGEST CROSSOVER EVER! And just so you know, it's the Peanuts characters that will be the main group, with Charlie Brown at centre stage. He doesn't appear until the last scene though. I'll refrain from spoiling any more and just get on with the chapter. See you at the bottom.**

* * *

><p>Prologue<p>

"Just give up puppy, you know you don't stand a chance against me!
Aha ha ha ha ha!"

Her cackle filled the air of the dark lands on which our story begins. This was a world that had existed since the very beginning of

time, but had never known life, never known light or darkness. This was a world between worlds, a ravaged wasteland that had for many millenium served no other purpose than as a prison for the greatest of evils.

The dark figure continued to laugh maniacally, enjoying the pain of the fallen being before her. His purple, furry head with floppy black ears lay face down in the dried earth. He had the physique of a fit adult man, and was dressed in pure white robes that covered every part of his body but his purple hands. Or rather, his purple paws.

The fallen figure slowly, and painfully raised his head, revealing the face of a dog with ruby-red eyes. The human-like dog stared up at the dark being with a look of moarning. She was like a living shadow, her body flat and tall, and contorted into the form of a witch. She was pitch black, apart from her eyes, which were a similar shade of ruby-red as the dog man. But whereas the dog's eyes held a glow of love and compassion for all, even the monster that had struck him down, the Witch's eyes held only hatred, greed and lust for power.

"I cannot give up!" The Dog said in a strong but gentle voice, forcing himself into a kneeling position as the Witch glared down at him in annoyance "The fate of all worlds rests on my shoulders. I am the guardian of all that is good and just. I can never give up, not while the realm of light still needs me. I can never let you win... dear sister"

The Witch's eyes burned with rage, a horrid purple mouth formed on her sullen face as she spouted:

"Don't call me DEAR!"

The Witch pointed a hand with long, branch like fingers at the Guardian, and from each fingertip she shot a bolt of black lightning. But the Dog-man, in a sudden burst of life and energy, shot to his feet and leaped backwards by ten feet, shooting a beam of pure white light from his palm which struck the Witch straight in the centre of the chest, sending her flying thirty feet and crashing into an already crumbling mountain, which completely collapsed at that moment and fell on top of her.

The dog Guardian took several quick breaths, keeping his guard up for the inevitable counterattack. He knew his sister well, she was far too powerful to be bested by a fallen mountain, it would hardly have left a scratch on her body. The Guardian stared around carefully, before closing his eyes and allowing his other senses to take charge. He sensed the shadow of the Witch speeding towards him from the ground from behind, he immediately flipped around and crashed a glowing yellow fist onto the ground, sending great chunks of earth flying and forcing the witch to surface.

The Witch shot another stream of black lightning at the Guardian, who used his power over light to teleport away from the danger. He reappeared ten feet to his wicked sister's right and launched a barrage of light spheres at her, all of which were blocked by a shield of darkness the Witch set up. With a wicked grin the Witch lowered the shield and cast a beam of darkness from her mouth in the Guardian's direction. The anthro dog set up his own shield of light

to block the attack, but no sooner had he lowered it to prepare his next move did the Witch fly at him and send him flying with a powerful punch to the jaw.

The Guardian flew a hundred feet upwards, but recovered in midair and shot another beam of light downwards at his foe, who retaliated with another beam of darkness. The two attacks collided, for a moment they met at one central point between the two deities, with each channeling as much power into their respective beams as possible in an effort to overpower the other. For a moment the Witch seemed to gain the upper hand as her dark beam pushed forward, but the Guardian then thought of all the people he was fighting for. Countless good, honest, kind hearted children of the light, who lived out their peaceful lives on the many worlds that made up his realm, people who were depending on him to defeat this demon, counting on him to spare them from the rule of eternal darkness.

He turned his love for every living soul in the universe into even more power, and finally it looked like his attack was overpowering that of the Witch. Of course she didn't like that, and though it caused her much physical anguish she continued to channel more and more of her vast power into her dark beam. The beams of light and darkness met once more at the central point between the two super beings. Now however, the amount of power channel into the beams was so great that they created a giant orb of energy in the centre, which exploded in a fiery supernova of light and darkness, briefly shrouding the forgotten wasteland in a cloud of dust.

When the dust finally began to settle The Witch and Dog Guardian were revealed to be lying in heaps at the opposite edges of the battlefield. They were both bruised, tired and bloodied from the battle that had so far lasted ten hours. Ten long, grueling hours. But still they stood up, glared at one another and charged forward, their raised fists covered in their respective element, ready to battle on.

Not too far away from where the giants of light and darkness clashed, but just far enough that most of their attacks could not reach, a man dressed in a red jacket and black trousers spectated the carnage. The man was mostly bald, but had a rather large and impressive moustache beneath his big pink nose, and he wore blue glasses. This man was Doctor Eggman, and he was the cause of this epic battle.

After another of his evil schemes to take over his world was foiled by his pesky enemy, Sonic the Hedgehog, Eggman had been trapped for a period of time in a realm between time and space with a past version of himself. He had been trapped there for what felt like Eons, but now that he was out he realised it had probably only been a few weeks, bickering with his former self over nonsense, until finally he couldn't take any more of the man that would someday become him and wandered off into the endless white depths of the unknown dimension.

Or at least, it had seemed endless.

After much wandering and no sign of a way out of that white space, the not-so-good doctor had been prepared to give up. But then he spotted something that instantly perked his interests, a door. A large black, Oak-Wood door with an old-fashioned handle. Not even bothering to question the likelihood of a door existing in such a

place Eggman had gratefully pulled the handle and stepped into... a desecrated wasteland with stormy black skies.

Cursing his luck but deciding it was still better than arguing for eternity with past-Eggman (AKA Dr Robotnik), the mad scientist decided to do a little snooping around, see if there was anything worthwhile to this valley of despair... and boy was there.

Dr Eggman watched the Witch deliver a powerful blast of dark lightning to her light-weilding brother, knocking him down, as he thought about how he had set the abomination of darkness free. He had just been wandering around, keeping a careful eye out for any danger or perhaps some useful abandoned technology. But after another hour of searching he found nothing and was prepared to just wander back towards the door to white-space. But then he saw it...

The Witch's prison had been a glass bottle. A small glass bottle filled with what at first seemed like a swirling black liquid, but was really the Witch's essence. It was placed in the hand of a stone statue of the Guardian the Witch was now fighting. Eggman had not initially seen any value in this object, but then, a booming, hazy, female voice echoed from the bottle. She introduced herself as the Dark Witch, a being of immense dark power who had been sealed away long ago by her foolish brother. The Witch's voice called out for Eggman to uncork the bottle and release her, preaching promises of riches and glory, conquest of all reality and the death of his enemies.

Naturally, considering how most of the supernatural beings he teamed up with had a habit of double crossing him at the last minute, the doctor was hesitant to reach out and free the Witch. For the briefest moment he contemplated just leaving her in her prison, walking away and paying no mind to the voice in his head. But then he realised, what other choice did he have? If he ever wanted to get out of this wasteland, to get back home to his world, then releasing this denizen of darkness was his best, and maybe only option. So he stretched out his arm, pulled the glass bottle down from the statue dog's arm and pulled out the cork...

And a giant mist of darkness spouted out of the bottle, slowly forming the silhouette of the Witch.

The Witch had been positively jolly about being released, cackling madly and casting bolts of dark lightning willy-nilly, smashing mountains and reducing the statue of the Guardian to dust. When she was done with her madness the enormous shadowy Witch lowered herself down to Eggman's level, genuinely thanked him for freeing her from her prison and promised that a new age of darkness was about to begin, and that all worlds would fall under her grasp. Eggman had meekly nodded to everything she said, before working up the bravery to ask her about his reward. The Witch smiled, and promised him that he would soon have the pleasure of defeating his nemesis and that he would have control over the world he originated. Eggman grinned a grin so wicked it matched that of the Witch.

But before the evil one's could take their talk further, a blinding light appeared over where the statue once stood. When it finally subsided they found the Guardian floating above the ground, a mighty aura of light surrounding his body. With a glum look on his face the Guardian greeted his sister, then scolded Eggman for setting her

free, telling him he had placed the entire Universe in grave danger. The Witch just laughed, greeted the Guardian as her "Little Brother", he insisted they had been created at exactly the same time and that she must return to her prison, and then the Witch threw a fit and blasted him with lightning.

And so there we were, ten hours later and the battle between the super-powered siblings continued to rage on, and Eggman could see no clear end in sight.

The Witch picked her brother up by the throat with her scaly hand, a look of loathing in her eyes.

"Why don't you just STAY DOWN! You can't beat me, you know you can't!" The Witch spat, raising a fist covered in darkness. But the Guardian shot a beam of light from his eyes directly into the Witch's face, blinding her long enough for the Guardian to wriggle free from her grip and push her back several feet with a light fist.

"I defeated you before, those many eons ago, and I shall do so again to protect the worlds from your influence" The Guardian spouted tiredly. The Witch growled.

"Why did you have to imprison me at all! I've done nothing wrong!" The Witch screamed in her brother's face. The Guardian shook his head, clearly depressed that she wasn't getting it.

"Sister, you abused your powers, you killed many innocent people, turned your own followers into heartless monsters of the shadows. You tried to take over the realm of light, shroud the worlds in darkness and destroy my element, bringing all that the people of the Realm of Light had accomplished to ruin in the process" The Guardian explained. The Witch scoffed.

"SO WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THAT" The Witch snarled. The Guardian shook his head once more, now looking a little nostalgic.

"I remember a time before all of this, when light and darkness were at balance. When the universe was first created by the Ancients, and we were then formed by the purest light, and the greatest darkness respectively. I remember when I would watch over the realm of light, keeping peace, while you would do the same for your Realm of Darkness, keeping your people safe and teaching them to use their powers responsibly. I remember... those oh so wonderful days, when we were close" The Guardian said, his eyes slowly filling with tears, as even the Witch looked a bit remorseful "What happened to you, my sister. Why did you try to take over?"

The Witch sighed heavily, staring down at her brother with a look of authority "Because it was in everyone's best interest. You saw how people across the worlds were fighting, you saw how, in their freedom, they went on to cause harm and suffering among themselves, starting wars and fighting over nonsense. I stripped my people of darkness of free will to help them, as heartless they did only as I commanded them too. They were truly safe, nothing could harm them. I just wanted the entire universe to have that, for every being in existence to be safe from their own recklessness"

"You really think that was the right thing?" The Guardian growled, giving his sister a revolted look "You really think turning all

living things into your mindless puppets was helping them?!"

"Oh yeah, puppy! And just what were you doing to help the people of the light, huh?" The Witch spat "You let them turn their societies into dumps, where concepts like murder, rape and crime may exist! You only ever intervened when the worlds were in deepest danger, otherwise you just stood aside in your palace, not even bothering to teach them right! I helped my people solve ALL their problems, why didn't you!?"

The Guardian stared down at the ground remorsefully "I was not meant to interfere with mortal affairs unless strictly necessary. It was the Ancients's plan to allow all living beings to live out their lives as they chose, make their own choices and learn what was right, so that when they died they would join the Ancients in the glorious kingdom of heaven-"

"And those Ancients!" The Witch growled suddenly, her eyes flaming once more "Oh, The Ancients! Those pathetic "God's" As they're called, they were even less helpful than you. They went to all the effort to create the worlds, and then they couldn't even be bothered to safeguard them themselves. And what have they done since? Arceus has been locked away in the hall of origins since time began. Polokus went to sleep after creating his world. Odin is a jerk, and Aslan... well, I respect Aslan more than the other six Ancients, but even he doesn't help his kingdom of Narnia unless he HAS to! Those old hacks don't give a damn about what happens to their creations!"

"That is not true" The Guardian said defensively "The Ancients care very much for the worlds. That is why they ordered me to defeat you, and seal you away when you tried to conquer the realm of light"

"Oh, really? I thought you did that yourself" The Witch said uncaringly. The Guardian sighed deeply.

"Sister, please. Try to understand me. I understand your reasons, despite what others may think I know you are still good, I know you are doing what you believe is right. But it's not... and I need you to realise that. Not because it's what the Ancients would want, not because it's in the best interest of all worlds, but because it's what's best for you yourself. Because... I miss you, my sister" The Guardian's voice broke, and tears streamed down his face. The Witch's glare disappeared, and suddenly she looked saddened, and touched by these words.

"I want you to come back to your senses. I want you to realise that your method for helping the worlds is wrong, and for things to go back the way they were when time started. I just... I just want my sister back"

The Witch's expression softened even further. She looked remorseful, a hint of regret apparent in her eyes. Slowly, gently, she reached out to stroke her brother's head... but then she summoned a blade of darkness and drove it straight into the Guardian's chest, piercing his heart!

"I am sorry too brother... sorry it has to be this way" The Witch said, her own voice cracking, but she prevented herself from crying "I never wanted us to fight like this, I always thought we'd be together in safeguarding the worlds for all eternity... but the way

things were, and I know they still are... I know I'm right, I know by taking over the worlds, ruling over it's people with an iron fist, that I can make everything alright. I know I can make the worlds a better place for everyone. That is why I must kill you. I know no matter what I say, we will never see eye to eye again. I know you will always oppose me, and I can't allow that, for everyone's sake you cannot be allowed to stop me. I still love you as my brother, I'm just doing this for your own good"

The Guardian breathed quickly, unable to even recoil in pain as blood trickled from his chest where the dark blade was still lodged. With one last saddened look up at his sister, he smiled and said "And I will do what I believe is for your own good"

Before the Witch even had time to register those words the Guardian raised his hand and blinded her with a flash of light from his palm, which covered the entire dark plains in it's brightness. With the last of his strength and his life force depleting, the Guardian of Light pulled the wicked blade out of his chest, summoned a portal to the realm of light and leapt into it. The light subsided the moment he had vanished, the Witch looked around frantically for her brother, and let out an ear splitting scream of frustration when she realized he had successfully escaped.

"No. No! NO! No, no, NO, NO, NO!" The Witch screamed, demolishing any remaining mountainside in the valley with her dark lightning. The Witch seethed as Dr Eggman cautiously drew closer.

"I hardly see reason for being so upset, oh dark one" Eggman said as respectfully as he could "No being could survive such an injury as you have just inflicted on that Guardian, surely he will soon die and-"

"I know that you ignorant swine!" The Witch roared at the evil scientist, who backed away and covered his face defensively. The Witch took a moment to calm down before elaborating.

"Of course my brother is going to die, I could see in his eyes that his life was coming to a close, and that he'll never reach the Hall Of Origin in time for the Ancients to heal him. But he was not suppose to escape before I could finish killing him! It does not matter if his physical form dies, his power will survive in the form of a great light and find a new host, while my brother's spirit will remain to teach the new guardian of light to use his powers. It's a safety measure the Ancients devised when they created us, if one of us died in battle a new guardian would take our place. That's why they had to seal me away, and not simply kill me. And it is why my brother had to die here, so that I could seal away his power and his spirit, trap them forever in the farthest reaches of the Realm Of Darkness, so that no one could ever oppose me. Now that he's escaped back into his realm his light will seek out the person with the kindest, noblest, most light filled heart in the universe, and they will become the new guardian! This puts my entire plan in jeopardy!" The Witch explained furiously.

"Hmm... I see" Eggman hummed, frowning thoughtfully "Is there any way we can track down your brother's power in time to seal it away?"

The Witch sighed heavily "No. I cannot enter the realm of light, during my previous attempts to take over my brother and I cast spells

on one another, so that our spirits could not enter the other's Realm. I can remain safe and untouched once I return in my realm, but I cannot enter my brother's realm to capture him or do battle with his successor... but there is some hope, you"

"Me?" Dr Eggman wondered for a second, before it dawned on him "I can enter the Realm of Light though, because my world is a part of it. I can track down the new Guardian and defeat them-" Eggman was cut off by the Witch's wild, humorless laughter.

"Of course you won't defeat them. I have seen into your heart, all of your memories... you are a mortal man who relies on machines to do his bidding. You cannot defeat the new Guardian" The Witch said coldly, but then a wicked smile crept up her sunken face "But you're right on the first point, you CAN enter the realm of light. You CAN track down the new Guardian. But we'll need someone else to defeat him. Someone... who can wield this..."

And the Witch plunged her hand into her own chest, pulling out an orb of swirling darkness.

"Only my spirit and physical form are forbidden from entering the Realm Of Light, my own power is not, if it is free from my body. Take this orb, it contains half of my dark energy. I will remain in contact with you from my dark realms, when you find someone in the Realm Of Light who has a suitably evil heart, give him my powers. We shall then instruct this chosen warrior of darkness to hunt down the new guardian, defeat him or her, and then drag them into the Realm Of Darkness, where I will personally do away with them. Permanently. And then at last we shall be free to conquer all" The Witch explain, her confidence shining through her glowing ruby eyes as she handed the orb of her of darkness to Eggman, who accepted it into his arms with a look of both uncertainty and a hint of jealousy.

"Not that I doubt you my dear, but this plan of yours sounds very flawed. First of all, if this is only half of your power and the new Guardian will have all of your brother's power, how can we be sure our warrior will succeed?" Eggman questioned, the Witch nodded in agreement, surprising the doctor.

"I know what you mean. I am hoping whoever is chosen will be a weakling who does not know how to make use of this power. I wish for you to find someone who is a skilled warrior to accept my power, and then we will give him a quick practise session so he will know how to wield the darkness effectively in battle. If it turns out the new Light Guardian is a match for him, or even stronger, I shall give more of my power to our dark warrior so that he may slay the Light Guardian. I'm not saying this plan will work, but it's the best we can hope for on such short notice. Regardless of whether we slay the new Light Guardian we shall still go ahead with my plans" The Witch replied.

"And, what exactly is your plan?" Dr Eggman asked, raising an eyebrow. The Witch smirked at him.

"To recruit the strongest, most evil weilders of darkness from every world in the Realm of Light, like yourself, and form a mighty army with which to crush any remaining resistance in that realm, and then destroy the core of light within each world, shrouding the entire Realm Of Light in eternal DARKNESS. You will play a crucial role in

this plan, Ivo, and rest assured, once we have succeeded you, as one of my generals, shall have complete control over your own world" The Witch explained in a crafty voice. Eggman grinned widely, likeing every word she said.

"I like your style, my wicked friend. I shall be happy to help you" Eggman said with a curt bow, though he thought to himself 'And maybe afterwards I'll find a way to usurp you, and rule all the worlds myself. Heh, heh, heh'

"So we are agreed. You shall set forth momentarily, just as soon as I may determine which world my brother's power has set course to" The Witch finished dramatically. With her new plan set forth, The Witch looked to the skies. Beyond the seemingly endless black clouds, she saw just the tiniest shred of light, the remains of an ancient sun, about to burn out.

"You were smart to escape with your power brother, but know this" The Witch said to herself, reaching out her hand so it looked like she was holding the teeny spark of a sun between two of her fingers "No matter who you choose as the next Guardian, no matter what steps you take to defeat me, in the end... darkness shall prevail" And she closed the gap between her fingers. At that exact same moment, the sun completely burnt out, shrouding the twilight realm in pitch darkness.

* * *

><p>In a far away world there was a small town called Birchwood. A pleasant little town where you hardly saw the adults, but the children were always out playing and enjoying their lives, happy and carefree. Well, most of them were happy, right now one thirteen year old boy was very depressed.<p>

Charlie Brown walked away from the baseball field on which the team he managed had just lost their tenth game in a row this season. He walked further and further away from the field until he came to rest in the park, sitting down underneath a small oak tree. He sighed sadly as he thought about the rotten day he had been having.

He had started the day by falling out of bed, then he fell down the stairs and hit his head against a table with a lamp that fell on him, then while he was eating breakfast he fell out of his chair at the table and hit his head against a fallen saucepan. After this he had cut his thumb opening a can of dog food for his pet beagle Snoopy, who hadn't the time to show any gratitude for his owner's action because he was busy living out his daydream of being a World War I flying ace.

After that lousy start to the day Charlie Brown had nearly been hit by a car while he was walking down the street with his friend Linus and sister Sally, but he still got a face full of muddy water as the car drove over a puddle. When the three of them arrived at school Charlie Brown's teacher surprised him with a pop quiz, for which he couldn't answer a single question because he had been home sick for a week and hadn't had a chance to catch up on everything his class had been learning in preparation for this pop quiz. When lunch rolled around everyone in school cut in front of Charlie Brown in the line for lunch, and in the end all he had to eat was spinach and lima beans. Then for the last lesson before school was out, the class had

a surprise oral test! Charlie Brown ended up making a fool out of himself when he couldn't think of an answer to the questions and just kept stammering. Even the teacher laughed at him.

Since school ended early that day Charlie Brown had arranged for his baseball team to have it's next game straight after the last lesson, for which all of his friends yelled at him in annoyance. And of course the game went terribly, Charlie Brown couldn't strike anyone out, his outfielders failed to catch and often didn't even notice a single ball that came their way, and when it was time for his team to bat, no one managed to make a hit. The opposing team, lead by Charlie's friend Peppermint Patty, won by a landslide. And while Peppermint Patty and Charlie Brown's other friends on her team congratulated him on having the bravery to take them on despite the obvious outcome, Brown's own team threw a fit over the loss, and ignoring their own shortcomings they all blamed him for his team's failure and chastised him for it. Lucy, Violet and Patty (Not Peppermint Patty) Especially complained, even going so far as to recite their infamous "Failure Face" Song afterwards so he got the message. So with all his friends angry at him Charlie Brown left the baseball field with a heavy heart.

Charlie Brown sighed again as he thought about it. He'd had plenty of bad days before, his life was full of failure and disappointment, but he hadn't had a day this horrible for a long time. The only time in his life he could remember feeling this bad was after he'd lost the national spelling bee and didn't go to school for a week because he was so depressed.

Charlie Brown had always tried to stay positive. Even when life kicked him down he always got back up, he always tried his best and was determined to succeed at something. He was sure that if he just kept trying, something good would happen to him. Throughout this entire day, despite all the trouble he had had he was sure something would go right, he had been certain his team would win that ball game, even though they had never one before while he was leading them. But no, this day had just gone on to be the worst day he'd had in years. He sighed again.

Just why was life so unfair to him? Charlie Brown had been lying awake in bed for years asking himself that question, but every time he asked that a voice just came to him and said "Sorry kid, that's not my department" Or "Your problems are too big for us to handle" Or something of that nature. Charlie Brown knew he was a good person, he was always there for people when they needed help, he was a caring big brother and a loyal pet owner, he did whatever his friends asked, even though he screwed everything up. And despite how his friends often treated him unfairly, he never spoke badly to them, he still considered every one of his friends dear to him. But no matter how much good he tried to do, nothing good seemed to happen to him in return.

He'd had small victories, sure. There was the time he beat Joe Agate at marbles and one back the marbles he'd taken from Rerun, who showed him a lot of respect afterwards. He'd won those baseball games against Royanne Hobb's team... but she had let him hit the winning home runs, so that didn't fairly count. And yeah, there was that race he'd won that one time, but the prize was tickets for free haircuts, and his hair was so short and blond he was practically bald, why would he need a haircut?

Charlie Brown's dad told him that everyone went through a time in there life where nothing seemed to go right for them. He said that everyone would have times where life just kicked them around, and people just wouldn't seem to care. But mr Brown also said that you had to pull yourself up, keep trying and eventually, something would go right. If you just kept trying, things WOULD get better, and life would start going your way. And to that Charlie Brown thought... just why wasn't that happening to him?

Charlie Brown stared sadly towards the sky. Night was slowly rolling by and several stars had appeared. One star that caught Charlie Brown's eye was far brighter than the others, and seemed to be moving... a shooting star!

Charlie Brown put his hands together and made a wish. He wished that life would get better for him. He wished that people would treat him with a little more respect, and that his friends would look to him as a real leader figure. He wished that, just once, he wouldn't be the goat. Just once, he wished he could be the hero...

And that's when Charlie Brown realised that the star was moving much faster than your average shooting star. And the way it was moving it looked like it was heading... directly towards him!

"Oh good grief!" Charlie Brown exclaimed, shooting to his feet. He thought about running, but the star, if it was a star, was falling so fast that he didn't know if he could avoid it. So he just stood there in fear as the blinding ball of light crashed down upon him!

And at that moment, Charlie Brown's wish came true... just not in the way he had wanted it too...

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><p>Tiger Lover 16: And that's a wrap folks! I must admit I loved writing this chapter, everything just came to me so clearly and it was a lot of fun to write. Ok, here's a few details. The Witch and the dog Guardian are two concepts I originally came up with as a little kid when I was playing with my toys. The Witch was the bad guy who all the heroes had to battle and stop from taking over the world, and the Guardian advised and aided the heroes in their battle against evil. Somehow I managed to adapt the idea of my childhood games into a feasible story, making the Witch and the Guardian brother and sister, coming up with a complex backstory for them, making them a LOT more believable, and making this story a mega crossover. It's less childish than it sounds, don't worry. You all read the preview, this story's gonna be dark, but it'll also have plenty of light hearted and cartoony moments and humour. And romance, there'll be all kinds of romance, I know how ya'll love that. And character interactions and development will come to play a big part in the story. And while characters from all sorts of franchises will be featured in this story, Charlie Brown will lead them all, and the Peanuts gang will all play main 's why this is a Peanuts-X-overs crossover. Some characers from different series will play bigger roles than others, but I'm hoping everyone has some time in the spotlight, and there'll be lots of twists and great story's. Mainly most chapters will be part of a wider story arc, but we'll get a few stand alone chapters that're just random stories about the characters interacting and a few funny stories, but there'll always be a plot

going on. I know I've been known to take forever to update anything and I'm sorry for that, but I have a semi-solution. From now on, the only stories I'm writing are this one, "It's the Philosopher's Stone, Charlie Brown" And it's sequels, and "You're Amazing, Charlie Brown". I have plenty of other ideas, along with writers block they're the reason I've taken so long to make an update (Along with my obsessive reading of The P-Nuts Protectors by Toonwriter, you should read that by the way). But I've set up a forum, which you should all check out if you're interested, where I will post all my story ideas for Peanuts from now on as challenges, anyone interested in the ideas I put there on that forum should contact me and write it either themselves or as a co-authored project, with me in an advisory and editorial role while the interested author would do the actual writing. Other authors can post their own Peanuts challenges as well. I haven't posted any challenges so far, but that's because I haven't been very available this weekend. I'll get to that soon. I will, however, write the opening arcs for two stories, a Peanuts-X-men crossover and a Peanuts-Jackie Chan Adventures crossover, because I've put so much thought into the opening arcs, but I won't post them until I've written the opening arcs entirely, and I don't have a schedule for writing them, they'll be put up for adoption straight away. Hopefully this should all allow me to update faster. Anyway, without further ado, I present to you the list of series, be they of video games, cartoons, anime, film or whatever that I will be using in this crossover:

Peanuts (Main series)

Mario*

Sonic*

Powerpuff Girls*

Spiderman, plus wider Marvel universe*

Ed Edd n Eddy*

Crash Bandicoot*

Harry Potter*

Pokemon*

Dragon Ball Z*

Simpsons

Spyro the Dragon (Mix of original series with elements of the Legend series, probably no reference to Skylanders, though that might be features as an alternate universe)

Rayman

Chronicles of Narnia

Kung Fu Panda

Jackie Chan Adventures*

Phineas and Ferb

Xiaolin Showdown

Kim Possible*

Code Lyoko

*The ones with stars next to them will be featured as part of the long first main story arc.

Below are also a few optional series who's characters I may use in this story. This is going to be a big story though, and I don't want to just stuff it full of too many characters. I might use all of them, knowing me I just might, but if I do decide to go with any of these series they will probably take a while to be featured, and I will first have to work out an appropriate way to insert the characters and their universe into the plot:

Star Wars

Spongebob Squarepants

Yu-gi-oh

Naruto

Batman

Ratchet and Clank

Viva Pinata

Kingdom Hearts

Ben 10

The Fairly Odd Parents

Shrek

The Incredibles

How To Train Your Dragon (Movie, not the book)

American Dragon: Jake Long

Lilo and Stitch

**Tiger Lover 16: If either of those optional series you're REALLY interested in seeing used in this story, tell me in a review or a PM to my other account Tiger Lover 16 SPARE ACCOUNT (This account doesn't accept PM's, long story, sorry) I probably will use these series in the story, I just don't have any concrete plans for any of them now, except perhaps for Ratchet and Clank, they're most likely to appear in the story. If there's another show, video game, film or film series or whatever other franchise you would like me to include in this story just ask, if I like it I'll seriously, honestly consider using it in this story. But let me just say right now, no one ask me to use Twilight by Stephanie Meyer in this story. I HATE

THOSE BOOKS AND FILMS BEYOND ALL REASON! I apologise to any Twilight fans I may have upset with that comment, it's just my personal opinion. I promise you this will be an awesome story, just be patient with me. I plan to update as frequently as I can, and I promise you now, I WILL finish this and all my other Peanuts crossover stories. Ok, I think I'll leave it at that now. Just as a final note, I'd like to apologise for how harshly I treated Charlie Brown in that last scene. I wanted to kick myself for treating him so badly, but there's a very important reason for why I wrote that scene as I did. more will be explained next chapter, and hopefully the other characters will make up for how they mistreated Charlie Brown here. Oh, and yes, Charlie Brown and the majority of his friends are thirteen, Sally and Linus are twelve and Snoopy and Woodstock... well, God only knows. Oh, and Joe Agate's the second main villain after the Witch. Have a nice day, please review.**

2. You're the New Guardian, Charlie Brown

Tiger Lover 16: Hello again my friends, I'm back. Yeah, I know I said I'd be back with a chapter of Philosopher's Stone or You're Amazing, Charlie Brown first, but I'm working on that. Don't frown at me or anything, my mum's just been in hospital for over a week, I haven't really had much time to write lately. And while I was trying to write my other stories I just got a lot of inspiration for this chapter and was compelled to write it, so sorry to disappoint anyone. Anyway, I'd like to say this chapter isn't really my best work. I plan to rewrite it as soon as possible actually, make it a bit better, but I wanted to see what people thought of this story. I had a lot of backstory to cover, and the exact situation of this chapter isn't exactly easy to write for, it's hard to put into perspective how someone would react in the situation Charlie Brown is in here. Anyway, I'm sorry if it's not that good, but it is what it is. I plan to write more of this story just after I update one of my others. I'm sorry for my very slow updates, that's something I'm trying to overcome. But anyway, without further ado, I present the first chapter besides the Prologue.

* * *

><p>Chapter 1: You're the New Guardian, Charlie Brown

Charlie Brown lay on his back in the middle of the park underneath the small oak tree. He appeared to have been knocked out by the impact of the falling star, but his body was currently surrounded by a glowing, golden aura of light. For the longest of times Charlie Brown just lied there, looking content in his slumber. Then finally his eyes began to drift open. But when he sat up and took a good look at his surroundings, he saw no sign of the oak tree, the childrens play area or anything of the park. All he saw was endless white.

Confused and afraid, Charlie Brown slowly got to his feet, rubbing his eyes several times and shaking his head in hopes this was all just a trick of the light. But when he looked again, he still saw the endless white space, and no sign of life other than himself.

Nervously, Charlie Brown got to his feet and walked around a bit,

wondering just where the heck was he. After a minute of pointless wandering Charlie Brown came to a stop and placed a thoughtful finger to his cheek.

The boy tried to remember what had just happened to him. He remembered the baseball game, and what a disaster that had been. He remembered walking dejectedly to the park and sitting by the oak tree, trying to find solace. And then, he thought, a giant falling star had plunged from the heavens and struck down directly on top of...

"GOOD GRIEF" Charlie Brown jumped in shock, shaking with fear and concern. He placed his hands to his mouth, a look of plain horror on his face as several grim thoughts surfaced in his mind.

"I'm not... I can't... can't be... I'm not... or am I... dead?" Charlie Brown thought, now starting to hyperventilate a little.

"My boy, you are far from dead" Came a mystical, soothing voice that nevertheless made Charlie Brown jump ten feet into the air. When he landed the near-bald boy began looking around frantically for whoever, or whatever, had spoken. But it wasn't until he finally relaxed his neck and looked directly in front of himself that the speaker revealed himself.

Seemingly out of nowhere the Dog Guardian appeared before Charlie Brown, now in a more translucent, ghostly form, but still coloured. Charlie Brown backed away nervously, weirded out by the impossibility of what he was seeing. The Guardian smiled and floated downwards so that he was on level with Charlie Brown.

"Don't be afraid Charlie, I am not here to do you harm" The Guardian said kindly. Charlie Brown rubbed his eyes a few more times to make sure he wasn't hallucinating, then smiled weakly as he didn't want to risk offending this... this... whatever he was.

"I suppose before anything else I should introduce myself" The Guardian spoke again "My name is Sparky, I am the now-former Guardian Of Light. Since the dawn of time, it has been my duty to watch over the Realm Of Light and all the worlds that Dwell within it"

Charlie Brown stared in confusion at the Guardian, who frowned thoughtfully "I lost you at "My name" Didn't I?" Charlie Brown meekly nodded. Sparky chuckled lightheartedly, but then turned serious.

"My story is a very long and complicated tale of wonder and woe, but only the most crucial details are applicable at this very moment. I come to you now because I am in need of your help" Sparky said importantly, Charlie Brown blinked in confusion.

"My help?" Charlie Brown wondered, speaking for the first time towards the Guardian spirit. After another moment of hesitation, Charlie Brown asked "But how can I help, I can't do anything right"

"Not true, Charlie" Sparky said with an air of warmth. He began circling Charlie Brown, who anxiously followed the spirit's progress "I know all about you Charlie Brown, I know that you are an undeserving victim of unfortunate circumstances. You fail to fly a kite, your team never wins a baseball game, and your friend Lucy

never lets you kick a football. But these faults are nothing to be ashamed of, and most of them aren't even your faults. And you have proved time and time again that you are a loving and caring person, loyal friend and responsible big brother to your sister. You do have potential Charlie, you defeated Joe Agate at marbles and won back the marbles he took from Rerun, did you not? You won your school spelling bee, and made it all the way to the nationals. And while you may have lost, the fact that you made it so far while many others failed to keep up with you is still a great achievement, one you should have acknowledged at the time. Yes Charlie, you can do things right, you just have to have faith in yourself"

Sparky stopped circling Charlie Brown and gave him time to digest everything he had said. The young teen was dumbfounded by how the Guardian could know so much about him, and despite the attempt to inspire confidence he still didn't really see how he could be any help at all to anyone, let alone a supposed Guardian of worlds.

Sensing Charlie Brown's doubt but deciding it would be best to save the persuasion for later, given the urgent circumstances, the Guardian snapped his ghostly fingers to regain the boy's attention.

"You are too hard on yourself Charlie, and I promise I shall do whatever I can to help you overcome your insecurities. But time is of the essence, a great disaster has befallen our realm" Sparky said darkly, which worried Charlie Brown.

"I suppose the only way to explain it so you fully understand the situation is to start from the very beginning. You see, while your people believe the universe was created by a single almighty God, there were actually seven God-like beings who worked together to form all of reality" The Guardian explained, then he clapped his hands, and besides him another ghostly image appeared.

Charlie Brown fell backwards at the sight of the illusion. It appeared to be a horse-like creature, but it's face resembled anything but a horse and had a long mane that stretched far away from it's head. It was mostly white with a gray underside and face, had golden hooves and a golden cross-like wheel going around it's abdomen, with green jewels at it's four points. The creature had green eyes with red pupils, and looked to be carrying itself with dignity and refinement. Though it looked bizarre and very weird, the creature also seemed very majestic and powerful.

"This is Arceus, the Original one, father and leader of the Ancients, Sole creator of the Pokemon world and the supreme deity of this universe" Sparky explained, as though he were reciting a speech he had learned from heart. Charlie Brown tried to comprehend what he had been told and made to bow to the Ancient, but Sparky spoke up.

"There is no need Charlie, this is not the real Arceus. It is but a hologram, to express my point" Sparky explained, Charlie Brown nodded and got up, still extremely confused about this whole situation as Sparky summoned another image. This time it was a large lion, with a golden mane and green eyes. Charlie Brown was stunned by how the lion could look so terrifying, yet also wonderful.

"This is Aslan, King of Beasts, the creator of animal life and the magical Kingdom of Narnia" The Guardian explained, then summoned an image of an amphibious creature with very long hands, dark blue trousers with a golden belt buckle, and a large purple top hat.

"This is Polokus, the Bubble Dreamer, Sole creator of The Glade Of Dreams and giver of sleep" Sparky then created an illusion of an old but bold looking man in golden armour, with long grey hair and an eyepatch over his left eye.

"This is Odin, the All Father, Sole creator of the Marvel world and father of the Asgardians, a race of lesser demi-God's" Sparky explained, then clapped his hands and made an image of... an enormous gloved hand?

"This is Master Hand, Lover of games, Sole creator of the World of Trophies, where he brings forth great warriors to train and do battle to earn glory and fame" Sparky said. Charlie Brown stared oddly at the giant hand, who seemed slightly less impressive than the other beings that had appeared so far. But the next illisioinary Ancient left him Speechless. It appeared... vaguely humanoid, but looked more like an Ancient Egyptian monster, with chains all around it's body, sandy-orange skin that resembled armour with bits of yellow and other colours forming various marking around it's face, and it had a most sinister grin.

"This is Exodia, the Forbidden One, a being so powerful he has sealed himself away, and wears chains that restrict him from using his full strength. His full power was used only to help shape the worlds" The Guardian explained.

Charlie Brown waited with bated breath to see what the last Ancient would look like. The Guardian clapped his hand again and summoned the seventh illusion. This one looked the most similar to what Charlie Brown would imagine God to look like, tall and humanoid with a flowing white robe, a long grey beard and gray hair that covered his face, so that it was not visible to Charlie Brown. However, it's skin was a bright yellow, instead of pink like a normal human being.

"This is... well, God. His name is the most commonly known among the Ancients, and most people in most worlds believe him to be the sole creator of life. However, the only world he created solely by himself is an alternate version of earth, named the yellow earth by the Ancients after the colour of it's peoples skin. He is, however, extremely powerful and loving to all" Sparky explained.

Charlie Brown stared at the hologram-styled images of the seven Ancients before him with a look of uncertainty. Were these really the beings that created the universe? And if so, what was the Guardian's purpose of showing him these images?

While Charlie Brown was still pondering over that question, Sparky clapped his hand one final time and caused the Ancients to vanish. And in their place... sprang up a most terrifying figure. Thin like a shadow and with her evil red eyes glowing maliciously, the image of The Dark Witch towered over Charlie Brown, making him fall on his back again, this time cowering in fear.

"And this... is my sister" Sparky said mornfully. With another wave of his hand he shrunk the oversized image of the Witch so that it was about his size, motioned for Charlie Brown to stand up, which he did so quite cautiously, and then Sparky cleared his throat before he spoke again.

"While the Ancients created the worlds and their people, they left themselves fatigue doing so. Arceus and Master Hand retired to the Hall Of Origins to rest, Polokus went into a deep sleep to regain his power, leaving four masks in The Glade of Dreams that could awaken him in case he was needed, God settled down in the Kingdom of Heaven, where good souls would go once they were departed, Exodia as I explained had to seal himself away to protect people from his own power, Aslan took rest in his own special garden, and Odin settled down in his own Kingdom in the Marvel realms, called Asgard, where he would go on to create a race of God like beings, marrying one and siring far less powerful sons"

"You see the Ancients believed in minimal intervention, they wanted the people inhabiting the worlds to make their own lives, accomplish tasks themselves and solve their own problems, so they would never have to depend on the Ancients for every small task. So they made a pact, that neither of them could visit a world that they hadn't created individually. But of course the Ancients cared about their people, and wanted to make sure they were always watched over, in case disaster struck. That's where my sister and I come in" Sparky explained. After taking a moment to make sure Charlie Brown was still following him, the Guardian continued his story.

"The universe has always been split in two you see, one half of it is light, and one half is darkness. Despite common belief, neither of these two sacred elements is either good or evil, darkness can be used for good purposes, and light can be used for evil purposes, it is all a matter of choice. People merely fear what they don't understand, and those who seek the opposite element from which they were naturally born into are sometimes corrupted as they become overwhelmed by it's great power. But that's getting a little off topic, forgive me...

"Now, as there were two realms, the Ancients decided to create two mighty Guardians, with power just below their level to watch over the universe and it's people. I was formed from the purest of lights, to watch over the Realm Of Light. And my sister, she was spawned from the mightiest darkness in the universe, to watch over the Realm of Darkness"

Sparky trailed off for a moment, staring whistfully into the eyes of his sister's hologram. Charlie Brown looked at him uncertainly, the look on the Guardian's face made him feel really sorry for the old dog. After a full three minutes of silence, Sparky sighed heavily and explained further.

"For a time, everything was fine. The universe was at balance, people were safe, and the Ancients could rest peacefully, knowing that my sister and I were watching over the worlds. But though my sister and I were always close and worked together many times to keep the peace, The Witch... had vastly different opinions on how to go about helping her people" Sparky said, shuddering fearfully and clearly recalling some unpleasant memories.

"I have always done as the Ancients commanded, and I followed their example, including their belief in minimal intervention. Of course I always looked out for the people of light, I allowed them to work on solutions to their own problems, create their societies in the way they envisioned them, and I only aided them at times when the worlds were at utmost risk. That, I believed, was what my duty entailed" Sparky explained, looking increasingly ashamed of himself "But my sister, she did the exact opposite. She cared deeply for the people of darkness, and despite the wishes of the Ancients, she aided her people in accomplishing virtually every task they performed. She built their cities, she solved all their crimes, undid disasters and wiped out all diseases and famine. She was not doing an unkindness, of course, but her people became dependent on her, and became slothish, ignorant and, if I may say, extremely fat. They had no motivation or interest in helping themselves or each other, simply letting my sister do everything for them"

"Of course the Ancients did not approve. They demanded that The Witch do less to help her people, make them fend for themselves more often, so that they would all grow as people, build character, and learn to work together to achieve peace and prosperity... she did not obey. She continued to solve all the dark ones' problems for them. But then one day, she decided that, despite all she had done to accomplish her goal of keeping her people safe from harm, there was still one threat she could not defend them from... themselves" The Guardian said dramatically. Charlie Brown raised an eyebrow, confused by this statement.

"Um... I'm sorry, mr Guardian" Charlie Brown interrupted, trying to sound as respectful as possible "But, I'm not sure I understand that. How can people be a threat to themselves?"

"In many ways Charlie" Sparky said "You are still fairly young, you don't yet know just how peoples negative emotions can work against them. While most people will just try to go about their business and are kind to others, all mortal beings are flawed. Everyone makes mistakes, as you would know very well, only sometimes, people make really big mistakes, that have consequences, both for themselves and the people around them. My sister saw the flaws in her own people, how many of them were greedy, and despite all she had given them some still tried to make their own lives better through vile acts, such as stealing. She saw that sometimes people would fight each other, and while she put a stop to all wars people were still getting hurt and even killed fighting over arguments. She saw that people were dishonest and argued over trivial matters. Basically, she looked past all the good qualities her people had, paying her mind only to the flaws that every living person has, and the negative impacts they have on societies and to the individuals. And in my sisters one track mind, anything that was a risk to her people had to be destroyed!"

Charlie Brown gasped at this, placing a hand over his mouth in shock.

"What did she do?" Charlie Brown asked fearfully, Sparky's face fell, and he looked both revolted and a bit terrified himself as he remembered his sisters vile actions.

"She didn't kill anyone, if that's what you're wondering. Oh no... she did something far worse. Not only did she use her powers to

extinguish the last shreds of light in their hearts, but she robbed them of their free wills. She destroyed their conscious minds, turned every last one of her people into mindless slaves of darkness... in effect, they became a new breed of shadow monster... the Heartless! No longer feeling emotions, no longer able to act on their own will, my sister had reduced them to slaves" Sparky said, horrifying Charlie Brown.

"How was THAT helping anybody?" Charlie Brown asked in disgust.

"It wasn't, of course, but my sister thought she was doing everyone a favour" Sparky replied, shaking his head "She thought that if her people were all soulless puppets, then they would be safe from themselves. And if that wasn't enough, she then declared war on the Realm of Light. She wanted to turn my people into the same sort of Heartless beasts she had transformed her people into!"

Sparky stared once more into the face of his sister's hologram, which had conveniently begun to cackle in a nefarious manner. Sparky sighed, the light spirit seemed to be in pain as he continued his story.

"Naturally, I opposed my sister. I was horrified at what she had done, and at what she was trying to do to my people. I didn't want to fight her though, she was my sister, and no matter what she did I loved her. So I tried to reason with her, I tried to make her see the error of her ways, to undo the damage she had caused, before the Ancients ordered her dead for her crimes... and she attacked me" Sparky said, wincing painfully and clutching his chest "And thus, I had no choice but to fight back. We battled for many days and many nights, a war broke out between the people of our realms as we fought. But though my sister was strong and more focused on the battle, in the end I managed to defeat her, and seal her away in a glass bottle. After discussing her fate with the Ancients, we hid her miniature prison away in a world on the edge of our realms. But victory came at a high price..."

"You see, during our battle the Witch had cast a spell on me, forbidding me as the Light Guardian from entering the Realm of Darkness, a similar spell to which I cast on her after the battle to keep her out of my realm. And as the Ancients could only enter worlds that they alone had created, of which none unfortunately dwelled in the Realm of Darkness, we were unable to heal the people of darkness. We could do nothing, but leave them as they were... I honestly doubt we could have restored their wills anyway, my sister will have made sure to destroy every last trace of them..."

The Guardian trailed off once more, finally turning away from Charlie Brown completely as he wiped the ghostly tears from his eyes. Charlie Brown stared sympathetically at the Guardian. For a moment his eyes wandered to the illusionary Dark Witch, her smile sending shivers down his spine. He couldn't believe that there could exist anyone so cruel, so... evil.

There was a long moment of silence, and Charlie Brown wasn't sure if he should break it. There were still so many questions running through his mind, still so much he didn't understand. Like why was he even being told about all this. Charlie Brown made several times to ask this question, but gave up halfway through an "Um... erm". Eventually, after what seemed like an eternity of silence, Sparky

turned around and addressed Charlie Brown once more.

"I know what you are wondering Charlie, and I implore you to ask me what is on your mind" Sparky said gently. Charlie Brown nodded, cleared his throat and tried to find the right words to express his concerns.

"Well, Mr Guardian... um, Sparky" Charlie Brown recoiled for a moment, wondering if it was disrespectful to refer to a Guardian by his first name. But Sparky gave him a weak smile to tell him it was ok, so he meekly continued "Well, I think this is an... erm, really fascinating story... I mean, it's amazing, I never thought any of that stuff would have been possible... and I feel sorry for you-really sorry, I just wish there was something I could... erm..." Charlie Brown fumbled, Sparky made a gesture to tell him to stop.

"Charlie Brown, it's alright. Though I am pleased to know you have sympathy for my tragedy, I would rather you just get straight to the point" Sparky said importantly. Charlie Brown nodded thankfully and tried to compose himself.

"Well... I just wanted to know... what does all this have to do with me? Why am I here, and why are you telling me all this? And why do you need my help?" Charlie Brown finally asked the question that had been burning in his head since the Guardian had first come to him. Sparky nodded solemnly, giving Charlie Brown a most remorseful look.

"Yes, I know this all seems confusing, but it all revolves around you now... as bizarre as it may sound" Sparky said. Charlie Brown raised a brow, and Sparky elaborated "You see, I always feared that my sister would escape her prison. Though only her and myself could freely travel between worlds, there was always a fear that someone would find a way to her prison, that someday, she would be released, and go on to continue her maniacal ambition to conquer The Realm of Light, destroy every last trace of light in the universe and enslave my people as she did hers. And earlier this day, those fears came true"

Charlie Brown gasped as the Guardian simply nodded to confirm it.

"A scientist from a world besides your own, a Dr Ivo Robotnik, he had ended up in the corridor between worlds, known as White Space, which resembles where we are now. I'll explain more of that later. Anyway, by an astonishing coincidence, his attempts to escape the White Space resulted in him discovering the Twilight Realm I had hidden my sister's bottle in. And of course he released her. I immediately sensed my sister had escaped, and went to confront her in the Twilight world, the only world in which we could both enter with the curses placed on us. I tried to subdue her, to either reseal her or else talk some sense back into her, appeal to the good that I knew was still deep down inside her..." The Guardian stared whistfully upwards, as the Witch's hologram gave her most wicked grin yet "But I failed, and my sister struck me with a killing blow"

Charlie Brown yelped in shock, shaking his head. But the look on the Guardian's face confirmed his statement to be true.

"I managed to escape at the last minute, but it was already too

late... I was fatally wounded, with every second that passed my body began to deteriorate. I could never reach the Hall of Origins in time for Arceus and the other Anceints to heal me, so I merely accepted my fate, and died in the corridor between worlds" Sparky said with a sad sigh of defeat. Charlie Brown's face fell, he tried to place a comforting hand on the Guardian's shoulder, but it sunk right through.

Surprised, Charlie Brown settled for saying something he hoped seemed comforting "I'm sorry" Then Charlie Brown mentally slapped himself. What good was it to just say he was sorry when someone had just died? But Sparky did seem to appreciate it, judging by the tiny smile he gave him.

"Thank you Charlie. Now, as I am the Guardian of Light, my death proves problematic for many reasons. My sister's return is the biggest concern, with me now departed there is no one capable of standing up to her, no one who can protect the worlds from her wrath. Mind you, with her inability to materialise in the Realm of Light this would not be such a disaster... if she did not have someone from the Realm of Light to do her bidding. My sister is crafty, she will use Dr Robotnik to further her plans. She will build up her army, gather the beings in this realm who have devoted themselves to the darkness rather than the light, and take over... with no Guardian of Light, there would be nothing to stop her..."

Sparky's ruby red eyes shined for a moment, he gave Charlie Brown an apologetic look before he added "And now, Charlie Brown, we have finally reached the point where you come into the picture"

Charlie Brown gave Sparky a look of absolute uncertainty. He hadn't the slightest clue at what the dog Guardian was getting at. So Sparky elaborated...

"Now of course my sister and I did not possess the Ancients' power of immortality. Though there was hardly a power in the universe that could compare to us, there was still a slight risk that one of us could one day be killed trying to safeguard the worlds. Knowing this, the Ancients created us with a safety precaution... if one of us were to die, our powers and spirit would survive in a ball of light, or darkness in my sisters case, and seek out someone in the universe who had a heart positively brimming with our respective element. And whoever was chosen by our inner power, would become either the new Guardian of Darkness, or the new Guardian of Light" Sparky explained. He leaned closer to Charlie Brown so that their faces were but inches apart "So, do you know what this means, Charlie?"

Charlie Brown, at first a bit disturbed by the dog spirits closeness, pondered over his words for a long moment. Then something clicked in his brain and his face lit up with shock... and a bit of horror.

"Wait... that falling star... you don't mean... I'm not-"

"Yes Charlie Brown. YOU, are the new Guardian of Light" Sparky confirmed. Charlie Brown stared in amazement as Sparky returned to his upright position "With the guidance of my spirit, it is now your duty to protect the universe. You are now responsible for making sure my sister does not take over. Now you must become, dare I say, the greatest hero in the universe"

...

...

...

Charlie Brown just stared blankly at the Guardian's spirit. Sparky gave him a curious look, Charlie Brown merely stared at him cluelessly. And then he burst out in hysterical laughter.

Charlie Brown laughed, and laughed, and laughed some more, all the while Sparky just stared uncertainly at him. Charlie Brown laughed for what must have been a full five minutes before he finally caught a glimpse of the look on the former Guardian's face.

"Wait... you're... y-y-you're serious?!" Charlie Brown gasped.

"I have never been more serious throughout my entire existence, Charlie Brown" Sparky replied honestly. Charlie Brown's eyes widened in shock, then he started to hyperventilate again.

"But-but... but that's crazy!" Charlie Brown yelled. After taking a moment to get his breathing under control, he added "I-I can't be a Guardian. I'm not a hero, I'm not a saviour, I'm not... I'm not anything! I can't pitch one strike at baseball, let alone save the whole entire universe! That can't be right!"

"I'm afraid it is Charlie" Sparky said calmly "Despite your doubts, you were chosen to inherit my power. Because you have a pure heart. Sure, at sometimes in your early childhood you occasionally did things that others may find selfish or inconsiderate, truthfully you have never committed any true act of unkindness or greed. And despite the way people have treated you, you are still a devoted and true friend and a good person. Your heart is filled with light Charlie, you are a natural candidate for the position of the new Guardian"

Charlie Brown pondered over what Sparky said for a moment. But no, that didn't change his opinion at all.

"You're saying you want me to be a Guardian. You want me to be some sort of great hero, to save the whole entire universe. Not that I wouldn't like to be a hero, I'd love to, but... I just know I'm not anything like that" Charlie Brown said hopelessly "I'm not strong, I'm not brave, I didn't know about a single thing you've been telling me until now. And to top it off, I've never been able to do good at anything. I always try my best at things, but I usually always fail. And if the whole universe is depending on me, then that's bad. I just know I can't do what you're asking, and I don't want to screw up at something that could put the whole universe in jeopardy, because I know I will. I'm sorry but, I can't be your new Guardian. I just can't"

"I'm afraid, as unfair as it may sound, you have no choice Charlie" Sparky said "You have been chosen as the new Guardian, and once chosen, you can not turn back. There is no way to pass on the powers of the Guardian to another, you have become the new Guardian of Light, and you are obliged to carry out the responsibilities that title entails. Whether or not you believe yourself capable, you are,

until death do you part, the Hero of Light"

Charlie Brown looked away from the Guardian, shaking his head in disbelief. He just couldn't comprehend any of this. Him, Charlie Brown, blockhead extraordinaire, the guy Lucy, Patty and Violet had nominated the worlds biggest failure face, some sort of protector of the universe? No matter what way he looked at it, that just didn't sound right. For a moment he tried to think positive. Maybe he could be the Guardian, maybe if he had amazing powers over light that would make him a capable hero, one who could actually succeed at saving everyone. And everyone would love him if he were a hero, maybe even... maybe even the Little Red Haired Girl... but no. No, Charlie Brown knew that couldn't just happen. He couldn't get his hopes up this time, because every time he did that, he always ended up failing and feeling miserable afterwards. In desperation Charlie Brown began pinching himself, praying that this was all just some very, very crazy dream he was having. But he wasn't waking up, and it actually hurt a bit when he slapped himself. If this were a dream, it was a very realistic one. Good Grief, Charlie Brown thought. Why did it have to be him, why couldn't it have been someone else? Why couldn't it be a real hero, someone who could really live up to the responsibility and handle the pressure. Or maybe this was just his luck. His bad luck was always ruining things for him and even his friends, now it was about to ruin things for everyone in the universe.

Sparky watched as Charlie Brown mentally beat himself up over his unfortunate situation. After vanishing the hologram of his sister, which he had forgotten was still present, Sparky floated down behind Charlie Brown, used what little power he had left to turn his hand semi-solid and patted Charlie Brown comfortingly on the back. Charlie Brown looked over his shoulder at the ghost Guardian, who gave him a supportive smile.

"You spend too much of your energy doubting yourself my boy" Sparky said in a warm, grandfatherly type voice "I know life is unfair to you, I know you have grown up to believe yourself to be inept at the simplest task. But, my boy, you need to snap out of it. You are a good man, Charlie Brown. You look out for your friends, you are always there to help them no matter how badly they mistreat you, that shows loyalty and a great sense of forgiving, which many people sadly lack nowadays. You are a loving pet owner, though Snoopy may not seem to appreciate you, you still feed him, give him shelter, provide love and comfort and do everything a good pet owner would do, whereas many pet owners would grow exasperated trying to raise a dog with such unrivaled creativity and wackiness, and would start to pay him little-to-no mind, or else abuse him. And as I've said before, you are a loving brother. Though there are times you have been too frightened to stand up for her around bullies, you are still there to comfort Sally and help her get by. It goes without saying you had a bigger role in raising her than your own parents, you have taught her right from wrong, helped her with her homework, and given her the support she needed to become the happy ball of sunshine she is today. Yes Charlie, despite what people say about you and what you have led yourself to believe, you are a wonderful person who deserves to be hailed and admired for his nobility and warm heart. And that is exactly the quality that is required in a guardian. Not heroism, not bravery, and not a perfect track record. What matters in a Guardian is having a good heart, the ability to love and forgive all, even those who forsake you. The determination to keep trying to help

others and succeed, even if your attempts are met with failure. This is the quality I have always most appreciated in myself, and it is a quality you embody every day of your life. Yes Charlie, though you may not have faith in yourself, I believe you will make a fine successor to me"

Charlie Brown looked hopefully into the face of his predecessor. He couldn't remember anyone ever showing so much genuine faith in him in his whole life. And the things he said... while he still doubted himself, a lot of the things the Guardian spirit was saying actually seemed to make sense. The way he put it, Charlie Brown did feel like he was a really nice person. Not really hero material, but a nice guy at least. But it was the mere fact that someone was showing such belief, such kind faith in him and his abilities, that made Charlie Brown actually cheer up a bit.

"I still don't know though" Charlie Brown said, hoping for some more kind advice "I really don't feel like I'm the hero type. I've never really been good at anything. And, if you're right about me having all these powers, I wouldn't really know how to use them"

"I never expected you to. The reason my spirit was sent along with my power was so that I could teach my successor to use the powers of the Guardian properly. I shall teach you to use your powers Charlie, and I shall be here to guide you all the way. You don't have to do any of what I'm asking alone, I'll be here for you. Not just to train you in using your powers either, I also plan to help you improve yourself. I want to teach you to be a little more confident, have a little faith in yourself, and to be happy" Sparky promised, completely sincere. Charlie Brown smiled, that actually did sound nice. At least he this Sparky sounded a little more encouraging than a certain "Licensed psychiatrist" he knew. But yet, doubts still filled Charlie Brown's mind...

"I still don't know..." Charlie Brown sighed, feeling dejected as he said "Even with help, I still don't feel like I should be the one doing this"

Sparky himself sighed a little. He sensed that he was close to convincing the boy, he just needed another push. But what else could he say to persuade him? Suddenly, he had an idea.

"No ones saying you HAVE to do this Charlie" Sparky said, surprising the thirteen year old "You may have my powers, but no ones saying you have no choice but to defend the worlds and face my sister. You have free will Charlie, like any other living being. Though I wish for you to go through with my request and become the new Guardian of Light, you can just as easily refuse if you don't feel you're capable. Of course, the only problem is that we cannot extract my powers from you, and though there are many heroes from many other worlds, there's no guarantee they alone will stand a chance against whatever my sister has in store for this realm. And with the Ancients unable to spread their influence among the worlds besides their own individual creations, the fate of the worlds really does depend on the Guardian of Light. But you still don't have to do this, if you wish you can walk away, continue your life as you please. I will not chastise you if you do, you are still young, and I realise I am asking a great deal of you, perhaps unreasonably so. You have every right to stay out of this, I ask you only because I need you to say yes Charlie. So feel free to choose, will you be the new Guardian, Charlie

Brown?"

Charlie Brown realised Sparky must have been trying to play the guilt trick on him... and it was working. Charlie Brown would feel like a real jerk if he said no, the entire universe was at risk, and for whatever reason HE was granted the power to save it. He still didn't think he was capable, and he realised he probably never would, but this wasn't exactly something someone could back down from. And also, this had been sort of what Charlie Brown had wished for. He wanted to be a hero, he wanted to be respected, and this was his chance to achieve just that. Though a million doubts still plagued his mind, Charlie Brown knew there was only one way to answer Sparky's question.

"Alright, I'll do it" Charlie Brown said, much to Sparky's delight
"I'll be your new Guardian"

"Wonderful Charlie! Thank you, thank you so much" Sparky said, attempting to embrace Charlie Brown, but he passed right through him. The now teacher rubbed his head meekly as Charlie Brown leaped back a few feet in surprise, having almost forgotten he was talking to a ghost. Wanting to calm him down quickly and to further his confidence, Sparky resolidified his hand for a moment, patted Charlie Brown's shoulder and said "And by the way, the fact that you accept this responsibility, with the weight of the whole universe on your shoulders and with your head filled with doubts, proves that there is plenty of hope for you"

Charlie Brown briefly smiled in appreciation at this. While taking some more time to digest everything that he had been told, Charlie Brown found his attention returning to his endless white surroundings.

"By the way, how do I get back home?" Charlie Brown asked. Sparky chuckled.

"My boy, you never left home. This isn't really White Space, this is all happening inside your head. Your body's still in the park. Ooh, which reminds me, by now someones probably walked by and is wondering why your lying unconscious in a public park. I suppose we'd better save further discussions for later, right now you should probably return home. I'm sure it's also getting late" Sparky said importantly.

"Um, ok" Charlie Brown said, though he still had many questions he would like answered before he went anywhere. But before he could voice any of these questions, Sparky clapped his hands and disappeared. Charlie Brown was about to call out to him, but suddenly found himself lying on his back once more. And then the whiteness vanished, replaced with darkening sky and the first stars of the evening.

Taking a moment to reassess his situation, Charlie Brown, finding himself strangely fatigue and tired, summoned all his strength to push himself upright. He then got to his feet and found himself back in the park. Charlie Brown rubbed his head, wondering whether everything that just happened was really real.

"Charlie Brown?"

Charlie Brown turned around to find almost every one of his friends standing there, watching with looks of concern, which quickly changed to relief.

"Are you alright, Charlie Brown?" Linus asked, as though concerned Charlie Brown was about to collapse and fall into a coma.

"Erm..." Charlie Brown mumbled, finding the curious stares of so many of his friends offputting. He pondered his response for a minute, not sure how to express his situation. He looked to his side to find the oak tree he had been sitting under had been badly burned, and that the ground beneath him was scorched. He immediately summarised that the encounter with Sparky was no dream.

"Well, are you alright, or aren't you?" Lucy, Linus's sister and one of Charlie Brown's oldest friends, asked in a slightly more annoyed tone. Charlie Brown continued to ponder his response for a minute before he finally came up with something...

"Well... sort of?"

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Yeahhh... that ending seems a little confusing, but more will be explained next chapter. I actually intended for there to be several more scenes in this chapter, including one leading up to the rest of the Peanuts gang finding Charlie Brown in the park, but I decided this was a good place to end the chapter, and I'm going to put all those scenes into a chapter of their own. It'll help space out the Introductory arc a bit more anyway, overlong chapters aren't really a good thing, a fact I'm starting to learn. Anyway, we learned a lot of important backstory in this chapter, and Charlie Brown's now learned about his new role as Guardian of Light. Next chapter should focus partly on him learning to use those powers, so stay put. And next chapter sets up two more key villains, Joe Agate and Thibault, while also providing some focus on Charlie Brown's friends. The big crossover adventures will start soon, there's just a lot of set up I have to get out of the way first. I've seen a lot of big scale crossovers before that aren't very good, because people don't take the time to explain things and give certain characters enough spotlight, I'm trying to do my best to make this a good story. I know a lot of this chapter wasn't very good, and I don't know how realistic Charlie Brown's reactions were, but like I said, I plan to go back and edit this. Just tell me what you think in your reviews. Now, while I could go on and on with this note I really just want to get this chapter published. So, thank you for reading and please review. Seriously, review, I haven't got a single review yet for this story.

3. True Friends?

**Tiger Lover 16: Hello again, dear readers... though there don't seem to be that many of you. I've got only twenty six hits for this story so far, and only five of them were for the previous chapter. Plus, only one review. I REALLY want to know what people think of this story, so please someone else review. Anyway, now that that pointless rant's out of the way, welcome to chapter 3 (Or 2, counting the first as a prologue). Now, I originally intended this to be a lot longer. However, the opening scene went on for WAY longer than I'd

initially expected, and since I want each chapter to have one main point, and I didn't want these opening chapters to be too long, I decided to save several other scenes, including an important scene with Joe and Thibault that sets them up as key villains, for the next chapter. Now the opening arc should be two more chapters after this one, with an epic battle in the second of those chapters. Now, for this chapter. This chapter focuses a lot more on Charlie Brown's friends and their opinion on him. It's meant to be dramatic, but I admit it's not fabulous. I know I could and probably should do better, but I want to get this opening arc written soon so I can get to the big crossover events. Chapter 6 (Or 5) Shall feature the first trip to the Mushroom Kingdom, and from then on we'll have a lot of great adventures in different worlds. And then the real juicy stuff begins... I won't spoil anything now, just enjoy this chapter. These chapters and everything in them are all important to the plot, remember, so don't skip a thing. But the most important thing is to enjoy, and I hope you can. As a P.S, I should say that people who aren't all that familiar with Peanuts and all the characters will probably not understand a lot of it. Do some research however and you'll be fine. You can probably enjoy it without doing so, but it helps to know things about the series stories are based on, that's all I'm saying.**

* * *

<p>Chapter 2, True Friends?<p>

While Charlie Brown had wandered off to the park to mope over the disastrous baseball game, his disgruntled team had gathered at the wall to sulk over their most recent failure.

"Man, what a mess that game turned out to be" Schroeder groaned, the rest of the gang nodded and/or groaned in agreement.

"The opposing team made zero faults, to our four hundred and fifty two. They scored ninety nine runs, we scored none. They made seventy seven hits, we didn't get one" Linus recited the disastrous outcome. The kids, now teens with the exception of Linus, took a deep breath and sighed in unison.

"We've lost a lot of baseball games before, but this is just sad" Pigpen said with a frown, as an overly emotional Snoopy burst out in tears and cried on his shoulder. He pulled away when he remembered how filthy the boy was, and began desparately trying to rub the dust out of his fur.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I just can't go on like this" Piped up Shermy, one of the oldest, but least notable members of the Peanuts gang "Sure, losing all the time is fine for some people, but I'm the type that just has to win every now and again. I can't stand all this failure, it's both depressing and humiliating"

"I hear you, I don't even know why I still bother with this stupid team" Piped up Violet Gray, another longtime member of the gang, though apart from ball games she hardly associated with any of her old friends besides Patty and Shermy anymore, having become one of the most popular girls in the school. And also a total snob.

"I think I might just quit" Patty grumbled "I don't fancy risking my

social status much longer playing for such a sorry excuse for a team"

"I guess we are pretty lousy, huh?" Freida sighed, leaning her head against the wall and patting her naturally curly hair in an attempt to comfort herself.

"There there Freida" Of all people, Lucy Van Pelt spoke up to comfort her "It's not your fault, Charlie Brown's stupid pitching is why we lost. Why, that blockhead practically let the other team score those home runs!"

"Yeah, that dumb Charlie Brown" Violet piped up. She was normally the first to criticise Charlie Brown for every little thing, and the few times she wasn't she was still the first to join in on the hate fest "Why'd we even elect him manager in the first place, he can't lead his own dog on a leash, let alone lead us to victory!"

"He's hopeless, completely hopeless" Patty nodded in agreement. The other members of the gang just nodded and grumbled at these criticisms, normally everyone besides the three girls was more forgiving of Charlie Brown and didn't approve when people spoke cruelly about him... the exception here being that they all hated to lose at baseball, and it made them all really grouchy.

While the gang continued to mope, being spurned on by Lucy, Violet and Patty's criticisms of their sad sack manager, Peppermint Patty (No relation to the first Patty), the manager of the opposing team and a friend of the group, arrived at the wall with her teammates Marcie and Franklin, both members of the Peanuts as well.

"Hey guys, how's it going?" Peppermint Patty asked, greeting her friends with an air of warmth. They responded by giving her the cold shoulder "Ah, still sore about losing, aren't you"

"No, of course not, we're depressed about something else entirely" Schroeder said sarcastically.

"Really?" Peppermint Patty asked, clearly not catching the sarcasm.

"Of course we're sore about losing!" Lucy exploded, making Franklin and Marcie jump back a bit, though Peppermint Patty was unflinching.

"I see. Well don't feel too bad, you were up against the national champions after all" Peppermint Patty said in an unintentional but painfully gloating manner. The Peanuts all groaned, her team was so good that they not only played in a real league, but actually won the championship match last year, a fact Patty hadn't shut up about since.

Marcie, sensing her friends' frustration, and noticing that Lucy was sending Peppermint Patty a death glare, tried to say something comforting "Well, you all didn't do too badly"

"Yes we did. We all stunk like Snoopy's collection of fermented cheese" Linus said half-heartedly.

_"I'll have you know my stinky cheese won me five blue ribbons at the

county fair" _The beagle thought indignantly towards Linus.

"No, Marcie's right, we didn't do anything wrong. It was all Charlie Brown's fault!" Violet replied to Linus's comment, causing her friends to mutter in grumpy agreement. Marcie sighed and smacked herself, feeling guilty that she had just bought Charles a guaranteed chew out by some of his less pleasant friends. Peppermint Patty glared at Violet in disbelief and growled slightly. And Franklin, standing a bit further back from his two teammates and the rest of the group, raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, that's right! That blockhead's supposed to be leading us, it's his job to make sure we all do our jobs right. His stupid game plan made us all blow it" Lucy supplied mercilessly.

"It does seem like most of our failures are the direct result of Charlie Brown. And not just at baseball, huh" Shermy added thoughtlessly.

"Now hold on!" Peppermint Patty spoke up, not at all likeing where this conversation was going "How is it only Chuck's fault you lost. Last time I checked, you all did just as terrible, and you were CLEARLY doing all that without following any sort of game plan"

"It is TOO Charlie Brown's fault" The other Patty protested, she had always disliked Peppermint Patty for having the same name as her, which often caused confusion among people as to who was who.

"He's always screwing everything else up, so naturally it's his fault that we lost the game" Violet summarised, prompting the ire of Peppermint, and a slight frown from Franklin way in the back.

"Oh come on. I mean, sure, Chuck's a screw up, he's meek, he's wishy washy, he has no confidence, he says stupid things, he can't pitch to save his life, I can strike him out in three straight innings, he... what was I talking about again?" Peppermint Patty trailed off for a moment, making everyone roll their eyes "OH YEAH! He may be a sorry manager, but you're all as lousy players as he is!"

"Oh don't go critisicing us, miss man" Violet snidely retorted, steam began issuing out of Peppermint Patty's ears "Last I checked, outside of sports, you're not so good at anything either"

"Oh don't give me that crap you stuck up snob!" Peppermint Patty yelled, raising a fist threateningly at Violet "Now stop taking the mickey out of Chuck, he does his best, and you should all show him a little respect as-"

"HA" Lucy interrupted with a humourless laugh "It's hard to respect someone who spends eighty percent of his time whining about how nobody likes him"

"He does too deserve respect. He's done a lot of good things for you guys, right Pigpen?" Peppermint Patty said. Pigpen, caught off guard, looked to Lucy, Violet and Patty glaring at him, and Peppermint Patty staring expectantly. Pigpen hid his face by looking at the ground, trying to think of a good answer.

"Well... actually, I can't really remember the last time he did anything for me" Pigpen replied awkwardly. Peppermint Patty gaped at

him in disbelief, but before she could do anything else Lucy spoke up.

"That blockhead never does anything for anyone, he makes us all look bad and causes us nothing but trouble!"

"I must admit, I don't really enjoy hanging around with him much anymore. It's always so depressing talking to someone who's so mopey" Schroeder sadly admitted.

"He does seem to get in the way more than anything" Freida confessed, merely because she hated to be left completely out of any conversation.

Peppermint Patty gaped in disbelief at her friends, she was sure one of them would have something nice to say, but no, they all just went along with the criticisms. Expectantly she turned to Linus, who was twirling his old security blanket. He noticed the look Peppermint Patty was giving him and turned away. Normally Linus would join her in sticking up for Charlie Brown, they were best friends after all, and Linus was full of wisdom. But it just so happens that he'd been having a pretty bad day too before the ball game, and any friendly wisdom inside him failed to surface. After a long silence, which he chose to break only because the entire group was waiting for him to voice his opinion, Linus finally spoke up.

"Sadly, I can't deny" Linus began morosely "Of all the Charlie Brown's in this world, he's the Charlie Browniest"

Peppermint Patty glared at Linus, who hid under his security blanket, feeling guilty.

"You see what we're talking about Patty. Even Charlie Brown's closest friends can't show him any respect, because he's done nothing to earn it. I mean, let's face it, if you looked up wishy washy in the dictionary, you'd see a picture of him crashing a kite into a tree. He's a complete blockhead" Lucy said in a mock pleasant tone.

"That still doesn't give you the right to criticise him so badly!" Peppermint Patty spat back.

"Ah, just 'cause you're in love with him!" Violet snidely retorted. What followed was a long and spiteful argument between Peppermint Patty, Violet, Lucy and the other Patty, with the latter three occasionally forcing the other kids into siding with them. And they all just went along with the criticism of their round headed friend, because as I explained before they were still a bit mad about the flopped baseball game.

Marcie sighed as she watched her friends argue, but couldn't work up the nerve to join PP in yelling the other kids out, so instead settled for patting Snoopy for comfort. Franklin also continued to watch the argument, still at a slight distance from the gang. He'd seen this happen many times before, Charlie Brown's team would moan over losing a game, they would all blame him for all their problems and take their frustrations out by criticising his faults, Peppermint Patty would try to chastise them while they yelled back at her, Peppermint Patty would eventually throw a huge fit and storm off, Marcie and himself would follow her back to the other side of town, neither of them having said a word. And then later, everyone would

just go back to being Charlie Brown's friends, he would of course apologise a hundred times for failing them, but they would shrug it off and have everything go back to normal. Then after their next failed game, they would repeat this process all over again.

But as he continued to watch the majority of his friends scream about how Charlie Brown was a terrible manager and what a failure face he was, refusing to let Peppermint Patty bring their own faults into the argument, something inside Franklin snapped. He'd never approved of the way people treated Charlie Brown, but he'd just never bothered to say anything about it because he didn't like confrontations. But he decided that the gang's rather cruel treatment of the boy had gone on long enough, and figured now was as good a time as any to start voicing his opinions.

While Peppermint Patty and Violet were childishly exchanging "Nyah"'s, Franklin walked a bit closer to the group, coming in line with Marcie, put two fingers in his mouth and whistled VERY loudly. After making sure he had everyone's complete attention, Franklin cleared his throat and said "There are a few things I would like to say to you all, and I kindly ask that you let me express my thoughts without interruption"

The kids, a bit taken aback about how Franklin had actually stepped forward to join in the unsavory discussion, exchange looks and nodded for Franklin to continue.

"Well, now, while I don't mean to be rude, I just wanted to say you're all a bunch of jerks for the way you treat Charlie Brown" Franklin said plainly. The majority of the gang gasped and bellowed in shock and indignant fury, while Peppermint Patty grinned and raised a fist into the air that someone was agreeing with her.

"What do you mean WE'RE jerks?!" Lucy bellowed.

"Please, don't interrupt" Franklin said, raising a hand and gesturing Lucy stay silent. The fussybudget had a few choice words for the dark skinned boy, but the aura of authority he exhibited kept her silent.

"I mean you should all be ashamed of yourselves for the way you speak of and treat Charlie Brown" Franklin answered, glancing at the smug looking Peppermint Patty "ALL of you"

Peppermint Patty looked at Franklin with utmost confusion, but he ignored this and continued his pre-prepared speech.

"You should all sit down and listen to yourselves once in the while, 'cause a lot of horrible things come out of your mouths about Charlie Brown. That kid has been a loyal friend to each of you for years, he's been there at your birthday partys, he's helped you with your problems, lent you his favourite toys and never complained when you didn't return them, and a whole lot of things that you guys take for granted. It seems like every second one of you is making an undue criticism of Charlie Brown" Franklin said, turning to Violet.

"You Violet, you treat Charlie Brown like he's a lower species of life form to you. You make fun of his appearance, you degrade him in public, you emphasise every mistake, even the insignificant ones he makes right to his face, you trip him in the halls, you constantly

gloat about parties you refuse to invite him to, and you yell spiteful and cruel things at him every five minutes, just to make yourself seem like a better person by comparison. Take that all into perspective, and ignore your jaded perception that Charlie Brown deserves to be mistreated because he's a loser, and how do you think you sound?" Franklin said sternly. Violet, at first glaring at him as though she wanted to punch him out, softened her expression. Several times she tried to speak up, only to stop herself each time. Eventually she just looked away from Franklin, raising her nose snobbishly and trying hard to ignore his statement. Undoubtedly, Franklin turned next to Patty and Shermy.

"Charlie Brown's been your friend longer than anybody else, yet you two are hardly bothered to associate with him outside of baseball games. Shermy, granted you never usually say much about him, but we've all heard you talking about how you supposedly hate him in the halls at school. And you Patty, you're almost as bad as Violet for putting down Charlie Brown to his face. It feels like never a day goes by where you aren't joining Violet in chastising Charlie Brown over his every fault, blowing his slightest failures out of proportion to make him look like and feel like a complete outcast and a reject. Well Patty, while you and Shermy are making out behind the lockers after class, you should both think about how it was Charlie Brown who introduced you to each other. So without him, you wouldn't have met, wouldn't have become a couple, and might not have even met Violet either. Still think he's not worth your time?" Franklin asked coldly. Patty, more reasonable and gentler than Violet, sat down on the wall and stared down at her lap in shame while Shermy patted her comfortingly on the shoulder, himself looking guilty and remorseful.

"Schroeder, Pigpen, I hardly see you two associate with Charlie Brown anymore, moreso you Pigpen. And while I can't say half as much for either of you as everyone else here, you guys still never stick up for Charlie Brown when people are putting him down. Well, you did that one valentines day Schroeder, but you guys are still never there for him when he needs you. Pigpen, you say he's never done anything for you, but Charlie Brown's actually the only person who's complimented your filth. Remember when he said you could be covered in soil trodded on by Solomon, or Ghengis Khan? How many other friends do you have who've ever stood up for you and your dirt? And Schroeder, Charlie Brown's the one who introduced you to the piano and in effect, Beethoven, your idol and role model. And you repay him by rarely doing anything for him, or standing up for him? If you don't want to hang out with him because he's depressed, maybe you should try saying something to make him feel good about himself for a change. Tell him you do appreciate his friendship, I'm sure that's all he really wants to hear from anyone" Franklin explained. Schroeder and Pigpen shifted their feet awkwardly as Franklin turned to Freida next.

"While I must admit you treat him nicer than a lot of people Freida, you still throw fits about him supposedly being an unfit pet owner. You're always complaining to him about how he should be training Snoopy to be a hunting dog, and yelling at him when Snoopy won't go along with your attempts to make him do just that. Well just look at the dog, no one can train a dog with that kind of unrivaled imagination. Snoopy doesn't want to hunt rabbits, but that's no reason to complain to Charlie Brown about it. I mean, it makes no sense to yell at him for Snoopy's laziness when you think about it,

does it?" Franklin asked. Freida stroked her hair, glanced at Snoopy and sighed in agreement.

"Linus, Charlie Brown is your best friend. He's always been there for you, he listens to what you have to say, he tries his best to stand up for you when people complain about your security blanket and he tries to help you with your problems. Even if he's usually no real help at all, his heart's in the right place. Normally you're very good to him, and I always expect you to be the first to jump to his defence. But in times like this, when you can't even be bothered to think of one nice thing to say about him in his defence, it just really doesn't show a good example of friendship" Franklin said, shaking his head. Linus peeked out from under his blanket, looked down remorsefully and began sucking his thumb.

Everyone expected Franklin to begin berating Lucy next, but surprisingly he first turned to Snoopy.

"I know you can't talk, but I do know you can understand everything we say Snoopy. And I say you're a very inconsiderate pet. Charlie Brown does everything for you, he feeds you, he gives you shelter, he excersises you, he bought you everything you own, even that old Van Goph painting, he looks after you when you hurt yourself, and all sorts of other things, any you rarely show any appreciation. I don't even think you know his name, even as I'm telling you this you're probably still thinking of him as "The Round Headed Kid". You honestly seem to care more about yourself and your little adventures than you do about Charlie Brown. Seriously, what kind of a loyal canine are you?" Franklin asked. Snoopy sunk back behind the teens, a saddened expression on his face.

"And then we have you Lucy" Franklin began, and everyone turned expectantly to the black-haired fussbudget "At the risk of being slugged, I must tell you that you are the WORST friend Charlie Brown has. I can hardly see how you classify yourself as his friend, in fact. You hit him, hurl ten insults an hour at him, you scam him out of his allowance with your stupid psychiatry, which you know just makes him feel worse so he'll keep coming back so you can scam him again, you degrade him in public, you hoodwink him into doing things for you, you accuse him of messing up when it's obviously you who is at fault, you point out and degrade every single small fault he has, and you run the risk of breaking his back, or even his neck every year with your stupid football trick, just so you can get a laugh. You're supposed to be his friend, he does whatever you ask him to do and he's always there to help you with your problems, but you rarely, if ever show him any kindness. You're sad Lucy, you're just sad"

The rest of the gang had been backing away slowly, prepared to duck for cover when Lucy finally lost it and pounced on Franklin and beat him to a pulp. But to all of their surprises, they found that Lucy was shocked speechless by what she had been told, and a few tears were actually forming in her eyes. Peppermint Patty seemed the only one in that group who was pleased with how things were progressing.

"Bet you all wish you were a bit nicer to Chuck now, don't you" Peppermint Patty said smugly. But Franklin wasn't finished.

"I feel obliged to point out, that while I salute your attempts to stand up for Charlie Brown, and all the times you've tried to stand

up for him and improve him as a person, that you yourself are far from guiltless Patty" Franklin said sternly. Peppermint Patty turned around and gaped at him.

"Since when did I ever..." But Peppermint Patty stopped, wondering... she had intended to ask when she had ever abused Chuck, but then thought back a little more clearly.

"In case you need help jogging your memory, I should tell you that there have been many times where you have been very unfair to Charlie Brown aswell" Franklin continued "You yell at him as much as anyone else here, for all sorts of stupid reasons. We're all aware of your infatuation with him-and please don't deny it-but he's obviously not. You play lovers games with Charlie Brown all the time, but whenever he fails to say what you want to hear you explode on him and say quite a lot of nasty things. It's not unfair of me to say he's completely hopeless when it comes to romance, he's not going to catch on unless you tell him, and you should know that. And you've chewed him out over much more trivial matters than that, I still remember that football game when we were eight. You critisised him and insulted him worse than anyone, even Violet, for missing those footballs and losing the game. But in case you're completely blind, you should have known that it wasn't even his fault! Lucy was the one that kept pulling the footballs away before he could kick them, if she hadn't done that he might have scored us a few points, enough to win the game, and yet you blamed our loss entirely on him! You all did! Seriously, SERIOUSLY, am I the only one who ever noticed that?!"

Franklin allowed a few short moments for this to sink into the girl. And within a few seconds Peppermint Patty was shocked, embarrassed, speechless and miserable with herself, the complete opposite of her normal persona. Franklin nodded truthfully at her, then turned his head to the side to face Marcie.

"You I have very little to complain about Marcie, you and usually Linus are the only people who treat Charlie Brown like an equal, and don't seem to actually make an effort to put him down. But you're guilty of losing your temper with him in the same way as Peppermint Patty when he doesn't respond to your feelings, you actually go the extra mile and kick or punch him half the time. Is there really any need for that?" Franklin asked, Marcie looked down at her feet.

Franklin stood where the entire gang could see him clearly. They all shared a similar look of shame and guilt, even Violet had forsaken her snobbish, uncaring act to look ashamed over her mistreatment of her one-time friend. Franklin gave them all a stern look, and wanting to make sure they got the message, he continued to berate them.

"Charlie Brown may be a bit of a loser, he does a lot of things wrong and goofs up the simplest tasks. There have been a few times when he's done things that might seem a little inconsiderate, though he never intended it as such. He may have a thousand faults, but so do the rest of us. We human beings are all naturally flawed. But in spite of his faults being more obvious than some other people's, he's a decent and kindhearted person. In spite of how you all treat him he still considers each and every one of you his closest friends. He'd do anything for you guys, he's always there when you need him, even

if he can't do much to help. He never asks for anything in return when he helps you, and he doesn't bemoan you completely whenever you make mistakes. Charlie Brown just may be the shining example of a true and loyal friend... and yet none of you are willing to show him that level of kindness" Franklin said harshly.

Franklin began to walk between the Peanuts, their ashamed looks growing increasingly more so as he furthered his speech "What that guy puts up with is incredible. Charlie Brown honestly deserves a lot more than he gets, the least he deserves is friends who appreciate him as much as he appreciates them. You guys never take into consideration his feelings. What do you think it's like, living every moment of your life under the impression that everybody hates you, and that the people who dare call themselves your friends only bother to associate with you out of pity? It's not good for him, you know. And mark my words, if this keeps up then one of these days that kid's gonna sink so far into his pit of depression that he's gonna end up killing himself. And I mean that completely, it's just the sort of thing a person in his position would do, I'm astounded he hasn't tried it before. Will you all be happy when he does that, will you all finally be satisfied when Charlie Brown is dead and buried?"

The whole gang were taken aback by that last venomous implication. Desperately they all shook their heads, trying to deny such a terrifying possibility. But now that Franklin had said it, they all realised... it could be true. Charlie Brown could end up committing suicide. But none of them could ever even dream of thinking they'd be satisfied with that. How could anyone be happy over such a horrible thing?

Franklin took a few steps away from the group, preparing to leave them to their own devices. But before he left, he had but one thing left to say "If you guys have any respect for Charlie Brown as a friend, you'll think about what I've said. I'm not asking you to beg for his forgiveness, I'm not asking that you should treat him like royalty or anything. All I ask, is that you guys consider everything Charlie Brown has ever done for you, and how you in return have treated him, and ask yourself... just how much is his friendship worth to you? Do you really care about him? Because if not, then you really don't deserve to be his friends"

And having said everything that was on his mind, Franklin departed from the wall, leaving the rest of the Peanuts gang to mope. Only now it wasn't because they had lost a ball game. Now they were completely and utterly ashamed of themselves, and how they had acted to their round-headed friend.

"Wow... just... wow" Schroeder said, slumping miserably.

"You know, I never really took into perspective just how much abuse Charlie Brown takes from us. And now that I do think about it... it's appalling" Pigpen commented, several of his friends nodded in agreement.

"He really has done a lot for us you know" Linus commented, addressing the whole group "For all his faults, he's the glue that's kept us together all these years. He's a true and loyal friend"

"So then why is it we all treat him like dirt?" Patty asked. The kids exchanged looks, after a few seconds of blank staring it became clear

none of them knew quite how to answer that question.

"I must admit, maybe I have been treating him a little rough too" Peppermint Patty sadly sighed "I don't mean it, I really care about Chuck and want to see him make an effort to improve himself. I don't mean to yell at him or abuse him or anything, good grief, no. I just don't have a lot of patience, that's all... but that's no excuse, is it?"

"I never really thought of myself as being unkind to Charlie Brown" Freida piped up "But, now that I think about it, there have been plenty of times where I've lost my patience with him over trivial matters. I remember one time I spent a whole half hour berating him over his refusal to let me take Snoopy rabbit hunting. But is that really being mean?"

"Hey, you hardly have anything to complain about. Not compared to me at least" Lucy replied, everyone was taken aback by how the headstrong and unapologetic Lucy was actually putting herself down "Franklin's got a lot of good points, I do treat Charlie Brown like trash. Of course I care about him, he's been my friend since I was practically in diapers. I don't know why I treat him so badly in return... I guess I just use Charlie Brown as a punching bag for all my pent up aggression... wow, maybe that's not the best way to phrase it. But it is true actually. I never thought about it much until now, but I really do treat Charlie Brown too harshly. I admit I should be nicer to Charlie Brown, I just wish I knew how to control myself..."

There was a moment of silence after that, where everyone waited for someone else to speak up, express their own viewpoints on this situation. Eventually Shermy decided to speak his part next.

"I agree that he's done a lot for me, and all of us. I really do owe him a lot, Charlie Brown was the first friend I ever had. Before I met him I was lonely and afraid myself. But he ended all that, he showed me true friendship and brought to me the woman I love beyond all else" Shermy gripped Patty's hand lightly as he said this. The blond girl smiled appreciatively at this, but he turned away, there being something else he wanted to clear up "I never meant it when I said I hated him. That started out as just a stupid joke when I was four. I can't truly hate the guy, Charlie Brown's so friendly and pitiable that it's nearly impossible to really hate him, and I'm sorry I ever gave anyone the impression that I did"

"We all say stupid things about people we care about, I'm sure he doesn't think you mean it" Linus said comfortingly.

"Does he...?" Shermy asked "You know he takes things literally" Linus nodded in sad agreement.

"I admit, even I feel sorry for the way I've treated Charlie Brown" Violet suddenly confessed. The other kids stared at her in speechless shock. Lucy was one thing, but no one had ever expected Violet, miss popular, the queen of snobs, and the person who had spent half her life criticising and mocking Charlie Brown to express remorse "I remember the days when we were four or five, we were so close back then... Charlie Brown and I did everything together, I really was fond of him. I don't really know what happened, but as we got older I started to take a liking to bemoaning him, then all these other

friends started coming into the picture and we started spending less and less time together, and then over time our friendship just seemed to degenerate to the point I only hung out with him so I could put him down for his failures..."

Violet trailed off for a moment, placing her head in her arms and looking quite like Charlie Brown in his depressed state "I guess maybe it's because I was jealous. I didn't like that he was spending less time with me, so I took my anger out in the form of insults directed at him. And then when I became popular I just started doing it to make myself look better, and then I actually started to do it for fun... it's sick of me, really. Charlie Brown really is a nice guy, and even with all I put him through he's still nice to me, and never complains no matter how harshly I treat him... I only wish I'd stopped to think about this sooner, because you know... for all the thrills of being popular, despite all the people who love and respect me... I miss being close to Charlie Brown. I miss the days when we could just hang out and have fun, being real friends. It's completely my fault why we haven't been truly friends in years"

Violet's head slipped from her hands and her face fell to the brick wall, but she didn't seem to notice nor care, more concerned with her inner misery.

"Good grief, what have I become?"

"What have WE become" Patty interjected "I'm the same as you Violet, I mock and discourage Charlie Brown for the fun of it as well. And I feel TERRIBLE for having done that. Charlie Brown used to be my closest friend, he was like the annoying little brother I wish I could have had... and then for no good reason that all changed, and we started working together to make him feel like an outsider. We're both in the wrong here"

"We're ALL in the wrong here" Shermy supplied "Some more than others I admit, but we're all guilty of being cruel to Charlie Brown at times, even if we don't always mean it"

"That is true" Marcie sighed, straightening her glasses "I really respect and care for Charles, I think he's a swell guy and I always try to be nice to him. But Franklin's right, I do lose my patience with him a lot. It's no wonder he doesn't return my feelings when I hit him every time I get annoyed"

"Heck, even I've been a jerk at times" Linus sadly confessed, gripping his security blanket tightly "I remember the time the Little Red Haired Girl moved away for a while, I tried to get Charlie Brown to talk to her before she left in the moving van but he just stood there, too afraid and nervous to do anything. Then when the truck left I threw a fit, I yelled at him and didn't talk to him properly for days afterwards, except to call him a blockhead one time when he tried to talk to me. In retrospect, it's a pretty stupid thing to get mad about, isn't it"

"And let's not forget that time with that Mary-Jo girl" Lucy supplemented.

"Yeah, you two traveled halfway around the country to find her because Charlie Brown was attracted to her, then when you did find her, you swept her off her feet with your love of blankets and left

Charlie Brown alone and dejected while you got lucky" Freida continued. Linus blushed slightly and twirled his blanket around nervously.

"I couldn't help it, she was so cute" Linus said innocently. Then a few seconds later his face slumped into a disappointed frown "I guess it was a little inconsiderate though in the wider picture, after all the effort we went through to find her for him. And I'm sure there's a lot of other things I've done wrong. But hey, I can't complain too much, at least I always try to be a good friend, and of course I care about him... maybe I could have appologised for all those incidents though"

There was more silence, as the Peanuts gang thought over their friendship with Charlie Brown and all the times he had been there for them, and all the times they'd been mean to him. Snoopy, unable to communicate with humans, was left to express his faults solely to himself.

"I'm not a bad pet, surely I'm not. I'm the most loyal dog anybody could want, I'm a great pet for the Round Headed Kid" Snoopy thought proudly. But then his eyes popped open and he slapped himself _"But the kid's right, I STILL don't remember his name. And why don't I? Really, why can't I remember his name? But is that really something I should feel ashamed about?"_

Snoopy hesitated for a while, before a new thought came to his head _"Maybe not so much, but actually, I am a little ungrateful... the kid brings me my supper every night without question, and when's the last time I even said thank you? I know I'm a dog, but I should still find some way to express my thanks. And I guess maybe I am a bit ignorant of him, a lot of the times I hang around him is just because I want him for something. And I've actually left him a lot of times to find a home somewhere else. That's hardly loyalty, is it?"_

Snoopy stopped, having been pacing around while he was thinking. His doggy face fell as he thought _"I'M THE WORST PET IN THE WORLD"_

While Snoopy was crying out on the floor, earning him a comforting hug from Marcie, Shermy came up with perhaps the grimmest suggestion yet.

"I just had an awful thought" Shermy said, all eyes turned on him "Some of you might not believe this, but when Charlie Brown was four years old, at around the time it was just him, me, Patty, Snoopy and Violet, he used to be a real cheerful and eccentric child, even a bit of a jokester. He got upset a few times, but he was a lot of fun to be around in those days. But thinking about all that we've just said, and looking back on our history with him, I notice there seems to be a pattern with his declining confidence and rising misery, and our mistreatment of him. So you know what that means? It could have been US and our mistreatment that turned him from Dennis the Mennace into the sad sack he is today!"

Everyones eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, it was shocking to think just how much sense that actually made.

"Good grief, we're evil!" Freida exclaimed, hiding her face in her

hands.

The friends continued to mope over these sentiments for quite some time, all hopelessly trying to find reasons to ammend for their wrongs or at least justify themselves. After a while Peppermint Patty, who had remained uncharacteristically quiet and thoughtful, frowned slightly and jumped off the wall and onto her feet, addressing the entire gang as she spoke.

"Alright people, we all feel really really bad for how we've treated Chuck, but there's no point sitting here moping about it. That doesn't help him with his problems, and it's not gonna help us solve ours. I say we should all go find Chuck and try to make it up to him for all the times we've treated him badly" Peppermint Patty said with a note of fiery determination. Her friends nodded and voiced their agreement.

"I'd say the first thing we should do is that everyone on our team should appologise for yelling at Charlie Brown for that disastrous ball game, which I think we can now agree is as much our faults for losing as it is his" Linus began, earning nods of approval from the other Peanuts "Then once we've done that, we can all apologise for the all the other times we've abused our friendship with him, tell him we do care, and make an effort from now on to treat him better. You never know, it might improve his confidence and make him a whole different person"

"Sounds like a plan to me" Lucy nodded, and the rest of the gang cheered their agreement. Except for Violet, who seemed slightly more adamant.

"Ok. But if being nice to Charlie Brown has any negative impact on my social status, you guys can count me out" Violet said with an air of her iconic snobbery.

"Well the least you can do is try" Linus replied.

"I will. I promise" Violet said, in a truly sincere voice that proved to the rest of the gang that she hadn't meant her previous comment at all.

"So, first things first. Where would Charlie Brown go if we're at the wall?" Schroeder asked his friends.

"Well, I know Charles spends a lot of time lying under a tree in the park, usually with sir sitting next to him" Marcie said thoughtfully.

"Stop calling me sir!" Peppermint Patty screamed "And that's a great idea, I bet he's right there now sulking"

"He did look like he was heading in the direction of the park when we all stormed off on him, so that's quite likely" Pigpen nodded in agreement. Snoopy hopped up onto the wall and stood tall before the young teens.

_"Well then what are we waiting for, let's go!" _For once, everyone had an almost exact idea of what Snoopy was thinking.

And so, with their goal set, the gang prepared to leave the wall and

head to the park to find their friend. But after just five seconds of walking, Snoopy stopped in his tracks and looked up in wonder at the sky. Freida was the first to notice the beagle was no longer following them, and quickly pointed this out to her friends.

"Hey Snoop, what's up?" Peppermint Patty asked. Snoopy paid her no mind, his eyes were completely fixated on the sight in the sky. One at a time the kids followed his line of vision and looked up to see a shooting star. But this was not like your average shooting star. It was a brilliant golden colour, and seemed to be moving very fast... very, very fast... and with the direction it was going it seemed to be falling... RIGHT DOWN TO EARTH.

The Peanuts watched in confusion and shock as the star plummeted down and crashed with an almighty bang into the direction of...

"The park!" Linus squeaked, just barely grabbing his friends attention "From that angle of trajectory, that falling star must have landed right in the park!"

The kids exchanged looks, wondering. And then it hit them!

"You don't think-" Schroeder gasped.

"You don't think it might have hit Charlie Brown?" Lucy asked. The gang all looked horrified at that possibility.

"No, no it couldn't have" Shermy shook his head, trying hard not to believe that was true "I mean, even if he was in the park, what are the odds it hit him?"

"With his luck... very likely" Patty answered. The gang exchanged one last look of horror and took off in a run towards the park. The kids ran past several of their classmates, accidentally knocking over Crybaby Boobie, who's wining they could hear the rest of the way, and ruining 5 and his sisters' game of jacks. The gang also met Franklin, who was now walking with Linus and Lucy's little brother Rerun.

"Hey, did you guys see-?" Rerun began, but was cut off by Lucy grabbing his arm and dragging him along.

"Yes we saw it, and we gotta hurry!" Lucy said quickly, confusing her dragged along brother. Franklin also began running alongside the group, himself very confused.

"Soooo... what's going on now?" Franklin asked, struggling to keep up with his frantic friends.

"Long story, but Chuck could be in trouble!" Peppermint Patty said without slowing down. Franklin and Rerun were still confused, but continued to follow the group anyway, both looking determined now. Snoopy also saw his little bird friend Woodstock sleeping in a nest in a tree on the way. He climbed the tree, frantically shook Woodstock awake, grabbed him by his left wing and began carrying him as he rejoined the sprinting Peanuts.

"No time to explain, just trust me on this" Snoopy told the small yellow bird, who merely yawned in response.

The Peanuts gang were halted only once in their rush to get to the park, when local bullies Joe Agate and Thibault, seeing them coming their way in a rush, decided to block their paths, purely out of the desire to annoy them.

"Well, well, well" Joe began calmly "You guys are sure in a hurry. Now why would the entire Peanuts gang, sans the Brown's, be-"

"Just shove off Joe! We're not in the mood for you two blockheads!" Lucy roared. They tried to get past, but were pushed back slightly by the two bullies.

"Hey, we were just asking you a question, and we demand that you answer it! Where are you going at fifty miles per hour!?" Asked the short and unpleasant Thibault. He was promptly slugged in the face by Lucy and knocked over, as the Peanuts gang charged off. Agate stared after them with a raised eyebrow.

"Strange..." Joe summarised. Besides him Thibault painfully got up, furious that he had been hit by (In his words, not mine, don't flame!) a stupid, wimpy girl. Joe glanced at Thibault, not caring the slightest bit for whether he was alright he commanded "Follow them and see what they're doing"

Thibault glared at Joe for a brief moment, but complied with his demands and ran off after the Peanuts gang.

Finally, with no more interruptions (Besides Lucy briefly picking a fight with Molly Volley, but that would take TWO chapters to explain), the gang arrived at the park. After a quick check about however, they started to wonder if the star had crashed here. There was no sign so far of a crater or scattered debris, which would be a clear sign a meteorite had struck. But more important than finding the falling star was the location of Charlie Brown. The gang walked up to where the oak tree was... and gasped!

They found Charlie Brown... and judging by the burn marks on the ground and tree, the crash site as well. But to their surprised Charlie Brown wasn't crushed, or burnt, scarred, fatally wounded or harmed in anyway. But that wasn't even the scary part. The really weird thing was that Charlie Brown was... glowing. His entire body was enshrouded in a glowing aura of light. And then they noticed impossible situation number two... Charlie Brown, seemingly unconscious and lying on the ground, was floating! His limp glowing body was floating a foot off the ground.

The gang looked between themselves, too shocked to speak. None of them knew quite what to say about this absurdity. For a moment, or perhaps several hours, they simply stood there and watched as Charlie Brown floated in the air, looking quite content with himself. Then finally, in an act that made everyone fall on their posteriors, Charlie Brown slowly hovered back down onto the ground, the light intensified for a moment, then suddenly died down...

Then Charlie Brown began to stir, and he finally stood up, facing the opposite direction to his friends and thinking over the bizarre event that had taken place inside his very head.

The gang just stared at Charlie Brown, still at a loss for words. But Linus managed to overcome his sense of shock for a moment to ask

"Charlie Brown?"

Charlie Brown turned around to find every one of his friends staring at him with looks of concern, which changed to relief when they realised he really was alright.

"Are you alright, Charlie Brown?" Linus asked, still not sure what to think of the strange thing he had seen, and worried Charlie Brown might suddenly collapse... or explode... or, something.

"Erm" Charlie Brown mumbled, not quite sure what to tell them. They all watched as he examined his surrounding, seemingly coming to a realisation. Lucy however, was not patient enough to wait for an answer.

"Well, are you alright, or aren't you?" Lucy asked irritably. Charlie Brown hesitated for a moment.

"Well... sort of" He replied. The kids, and dog and bird, stared imploringly at him. But before Charlie Brown could even start on thinking of a follow up, the spirit of Sparky, the former Guardian of Light, rose up out of his body and hovered over the group.

"May I help to explain?" Sparky asked the children. Everyone stared blankly at Sparky for a moment. Then they all screamed and fell on their butts again. Everyone except Rerun, who's eyes widened with amazement.

"Cool!" Rerun said with the excitement of a dozen five year olds on Christmas morning.

After giving the gang another moment to stare at him in shock before standing up, Sparky floated down so that he was directly between Charlie Brown and the others.

"I know what you're thinking, and fear not. Your friend is fine... more than fine, in fact. Rejoice, children of the light, for your good friend Charlie Brown is the new Guardian of Light. It is he who shall rise up and bring an end to the Dark Witch's reign of terror. Rejoice, for your friend Charlie is about to become the greatest hero in this universe" Sparky announced...

...

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...

"I lost you all after "I know what you're thinking", didn't I?" Sparky asked knowingly. The Peanuts didn't speak. They just continued to stare at him in open mouthed before looking down imploringly at Charlie Brown.

"Is that a talking, floating dog in white robes?" Violet asked, dumbfounded.

"It's a long story" Charlie Brown told them meekly.

"Indeed, a very long story. So to hear it, come with us to Charlie Brown's home, so we can tell Sally as well. Then we shouldn't have to

repeat ourselves again" Sparky said wisely. Sparky motioned to Charlie Brown to lead the way home, which he did so quite awkwardly. The friends exchanged a final look of uncertainty before following Charlie Brown out of the park.

Nearby, Thibault had hidden himself within a bush, and had been watching that whole scene unfold. Needless to say his jaw had fallen so far it was set to dislodge from his face.

"I have GOT to tell Joe about this!" Thibault shouted after a long silence. After one last look at the scorched grass Charlie Brown had been hovering over, Thibault ran off as fast as he could to his and Joe Agate's usual hangout.

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: And thus, there you have it folks. Now, I know there's probably a million questions floating through your minds, but most of them will be answered next chapter hopefully. I will answer a few though. For those of you wondering why I wrote this, well, I've always felt sorry for Charlie Brown. His whole lovable loser routine made me really appreciate his character, especially after watching the movie "A Boy Named Charlie Brown". And it wasn't long before Charlie Brown became one of, it not my all time favourite fictional character, which also lead to me writing Peanuts fanfictions. Every time I saw Charlie Brown mess up in a special or comic strip, I would feel really bad for him and wish he could succeed. But another thing I notice, his friends are jerks to him. Not all of them, of course, and not all the time, but as I explained above, people do treat him very unfairly very often. It's no wonder he's such a sad sack with the way he's treated, and I wish his friends would realise their faults and treat him better. I think that's what every fan really wants, but a lot of people just aren't motivated to write about it. This is all part of everyones character development, just so you know. I wanted everyone to realise that, while Charlie Brown has a lot of faults, so do they. Our faults are what make us human, and Charlie Brown is a perfect example of that. I wanted to have everyone feel sorry for Charlie Brown, and realise that they treat him a little too harshly, particularly Violet, Lucy and Patty. This'll be a part of how they come to accept him as a great leader among themselves and all the other fictional heroes that will be featured in this story. Most likely they won't completely change their attitudes by next chapter, and Charlie Brown's certainly not changing his attitude for a while... well, not to a great extent, at least. But I wanted to try adding some real solid development to everyones relationships with Charlie Brown, to give them more of a role in the plot of this story. I chose Franklin as the guy that yells the truth in everyones faces because, as far as I can remember he's the only character that has never done Charlie Brown any wrong, and they get along very well. There'll be plenty more developments as the story continues, so stay tuned. And please, PLEASE review. Just one more would be nice. Thank you, have a very good day. And by the way, about my other stories, I don't know when they'll be up... I work on creative spurts, you see, I feel compelled to write for this story at the moment, so I want to write as much as I can while I've still got it in me. Hopefully I'll have one of these moments for Philosopher's Stone and You're Amazing, Charlie Brown pretty soon. Well, that's all for now, goodbye folks, see you later.

4. Darkness Rises

****Tiger Lover 16:** Hello again. How've you been. I admit, I'm only half satisfied with this chapter. The first scene I really had trouble writing, it took me forever to get done and I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do with it, and with all the developments I had to make to get this story rolling it was a really difficult part to write, so I'm sorry if it isn't very good. I do plan to try and edit these first few chapters sometime next year, I promise the story will get better when we reach the massive crossover adventures. I'm much more pleased with the villains scenes in this chapter though, I think they came out really well, and I had a lot of fun writing it. While I'm still a bit dissapointed by some parts, this chapter is VERY important, it contains a lot of vital story points that will affect the plot in the future, so don't skip anything. I'm talking mainly to you mew. Though I hope I get a few more reviews this time. Anyway, I'll save the rest of my points for the end, hope you can enjoy this chapter.**

* * *

><p>Chapter 3, Darkness rises<p>

Charlie Brown sat in his usual beanbag at home. The spirit of Sparky hovered next to him while his friends, Snoopy and Woodstock, and his sister Sally sat around the room. Violet, Patty and Shermy sat on the couch, Sally and Linus took up a spot on the spare bean bag, and the rest either sat on the floor or chose to stand.

With assistance from the original Guardian of Light, Charlie Brown had just spent the past hour trying to explain everything he knew about his current situation. He told them of the Ancients, Sparky and his sister the Dark Witch, how the Witch had gone bad and was sealed away, that she had escaped and killed Sparky, and now Charlie Brown was the new Guardian of Light. All the while the Peanuts gang stared in awe... and more than a little uncertainty. At the point we come in, Charlie Brown was just rounding up his tale.

"So then Sparky vanished for a moment and I woke up. Then I found all of you gathered behind me, Sparky's spirit appeared again and led us here, and... well, I think that's everything?" Charlie Brown said, thinking hard about any possible details he may have left out.

"You're forgetting how Molly Volley ambushed us and clobbered Lucille on the way here, but that's hardly important" Peppermint Patty piped up.

"I could have taken her, if you hadn't gotten in the way" Shot back an angry Lucy, with her arm in an oversized cast.

Charlie Brown smiled meekly at the slightly volatile Lucy and turned to the rest of the group. He was really nervous about how they would react to this. Of course he thought with Sparky here they weren't likely to laugh and call him an attention-seeking liar, after seeing a floating purple dog spirit you'd believe anything you heard too. But he still had a good feeling they were going to laugh, he was sure none of them would think him capable of saving the whole entire universe, and insist there had been a mistake. And he had been quite certain that Violet, Patty and Lucy were all going to start mocking

him and call him a lousy hero, or something along those lines. But for reasons beyond Charlie Brown's understanding, none of them did.

Though the gang's opinions were all obvious on their faces, none of them seemed willing to say much about this whole predicament. In fact, Violet and Lucy both looked like they were aching to express their views and criticisms, but were trying hard to stop themselves. This left Charlie Brown extremely confused.

For a long moment after Charlie Brown had finished talking the room remained silent. The kids all looked between themselves and questionably at Charlie Brown, none of them able to find the right words to express how they felt. Or at least, they couldn't find words that wouldn't guarantee the boy's feeling would be hurt, which they were all trying not to do right now. All except Sally, who had been left out of that little conversation at the wall and had no problem complaining.

"So, basically what you're saying is my brother's got God-like powers over light, and he's got to go around all these worlds and protect them from some evil witch who wants to cover everything in darkness?" Sally asked Sparky directly.

"Well, I suppose that is the short version of it, yes" Sparky said with a nod.

"ARE YOU NUTS? My brother can't do THAT, he's bound to screw up!" Sally said in an exaggerated panicky voice, the rest of the gang groaned and rolled their eyes while Charlie Brown sighed dejectedly.

"Ah come on Sally, give him some credit" Peppermint Patty said reasonably, even though she too felt she was sort of right.

"Yeah, Charlie Brown would make a great hero" Violet said. This earned her odd looks from everyone, not least from Charlie Brown himself. The girl in the green dress looked quite sheepish as Charlie Brown stared imploringly to her. She had just said that because she wanted to sound supportive for once, even if it was an outright lie. When Charlie Brown failed to look away she sunk back into the couch and hid behind Patty as best she could, to which Charlie Brown looked away. Sally frowned at her odd behaviour, and the looks on her friends' faces.

"What are you two talking about? I mean, sure, my brother has some good qualities, but not a lot. He can't possibly be like a super hero or anything" Sally said. She wasn't trying to be mean, for once in her life she was actually trying to speak logically. And plus, if everything she'd been told was true then she didn't want her brother running around fighting bad guys. He could get killed!

Sensing her thoughts, Sparky floated down closer to Sally and patted her shoulder with his ghostly hand.

"Your brother may have his faults Sally, but he has a good heart. Being Charlie's sister you should know that better than anyone. I understand your concerns, but trust me when I say that your brother will be alright. He'll be supported every step of the way, and I for one am quite certain he is up to the task" Sparky said gently. Sally

stared in wonder at him, though still not truly convinced.

"But what if he's not? My brother never wins anything, he's sure to just get himself hurt. Can't it please be someone else?" Sally asked, surprisingly desperate. Sparky shook his head sadly.

"Once the decision is made as to who will be the next Guardian, there can be no other choice. It's sounds unfair, but this is the way things are" Sparky said softly. Sally looked past him to look at her equally nervous brother. She sighed sadly and looked away, grabbing the end of Linus's security blanket and rubbing it against her cheek. Linus looked confused and then offended by her actions and yanked the blanket out of her hand.

Charlie Brown continued to gaze at his sister for a moment, contemplating what she had said. Of course it hurt to hear her say she didn't believe he could be a hero, but he knew she wasn't being spiteful. A good brother could always tell how his sister was really feeling, and he knew Sally was just worried about him. And a part of Charlie Brown did appreciate that she was actually voicing her concerns, whereas his friends had thus far refused to give him their honest opinion.

With the mood in the living room still awkward most of the Peanuts gang were unwilling to speak at the moment. Sparky felt he should try and restart the flow of conversation, but waited a bit longer to see if the kids could come up with anything. Eventually Rerun, the youngest of the gang by two years, raised his hand like he would in class with his teacher.

"What sort of powers does Charlie Brown have?" The youngest Van Pelt asked eagerly. Sparky smiled when he saw this perked up the other children.

"Well, he will have many powers. He can manipulate all forms of light and reshape them into whatever he wants. He can blast it out in beams and spheres, create light shields and fly to any height, while also being able to breath in areas without air, like the vacuum of space. And many more amazing abilities" Sparky explained. The Peanuts gang all looked at Charlie Brown in awe, trying to imagine him doing all that. Charlie Brown couldn't help but fantasise himself, it did sound like fun... if you took out the part where he would have to use these powers to battle vile villains who wanted to kill him.

"This all sounds pretty impressive" Linus summarised the general opinion "But is this really the only option. I don't wish to undermine the confidence of my best friend any more than it already has been through years of abuse, but in a logical sense the prospect of sending a thirteen year old boy out to fight a war against a demonic entity of darkness is completely unreasonable. I'm sure these Ancients of which you speak would feel the same way"

"I am certain they do Linus" Sparky nodded, proud to see a boy with such wisdom and common sense "But as I have said, there is nothing we can do. For your comfort I should tell you, that in this universe everything happens for a reason. Charlie Brown's being chosen was no mere coincidence, though there has been no prophecy or similar plot device to tell us so, it was always Charlie Brown's destiny to take my place as Guardian of Light. And while none of you may believe that, even if you politely refuse to say it to avoid hurting your

friend, Charlie Brown is meant to fight for the universe. And he will most likely succeed, if only you believe in him. And besides, there are many heroes in other worlds that are even younger than him and face great threats, and they manage to come out alright"

Sparky's words brought some slight sense of relief to a few of the Peanuts, but this was still a pretty bizarre and unbelievable situation. Charlie Brown was surprised by Sparky's comment about his friends not wanting to hurt his feelings. I mean, yeah, most friends would probably do that, but at least one or two of his friends would usually be going off into some sort of rant about him by now. And the majority of them had just suffered a horrible loss at baseball again, even the shock of all this Guardian business shouldn't have been enough to make them forget that. Just why was everybody acting so strange?

"So, what exactly does Charlie Brown need to do now?" Franklin asked what was perhaps the all important question. Sparky's ears drooped, knowing this next bit of information wasn't going to go down well.

"Charlie will have to come with me to the Light palace, a specially constructed fortress within the white space, so that he can be trained to use his abilities. After that, he will have to travel between the many worlds in the realm and unite the greatest heroes the Realm of Light has to offer, to counter any sinister plans my sister may form" Sparky hesitated before saying the surely saddest part of it all "Meaning he will have to leave this world, and all of you behind for perhaps the rest of this journey. Which could possibly take many long years"

Gasps filled the room, jaws hit the floor, the Peanuts gaped in horror and some even fell out of their seats. Charlie Brown was the most devastated.

"I have to leave my friends and family behind!? You never said that!" Charlie Brown screamed frightfully, Sparky sighed apologetically.

"I am truly sorry, but it should have been obvious. I do not intend to-"

"This isn't fair!" Lucy interrupted, looking on the verge of nervous collapse "You can't just take Charlie Brown away like that! We were all about to finally start treating him better, and now you're telling us we might never see him again!? That's not fair! THAT'S JUST NOT FAIR"

"Wait, what?" Charlie Brown said, confused about that middle part.

"I agree with you Lucy, it isn't fair. It is the most unfair part of all this. But though it causes me great inner turmoil to tear apart friendships, the fate of the universe is more important, I'm sure you all agree" Sparky said seriously. The kids all had to admit that sounded right... but that doesn't mean they could accept it.

"But why does he have to leave for years? He can come back here whenever he wants to visit, can't he?" Peppermint asked, desperately trying for a reasonable solution.

"He probably can, but with my sister's track record of causing chaos it would give us only very rare occasions to do so, unless she chooses to assault this world on a daily basis. Which... I highly doubt" Sparky replied. The Peanuts, for a moment hopeful, grew mournful once more. Everyone stared sadly at Charlie Brown, who was starting to hyperventilate.

"Don't I get a say in this?" Charlie Brown pleaded.

"Of course you do Charlie, you are free to speak as much as you want. This is your fate we are discussing, you don't need to ask to voice your thoughts" Sparky said gently. Charlie Brown took a moment to carefully plan his next words, painfully aware of the worried looks his friends were giving him. It really didn't help that Sally and Snoopy were on the verge of tears.

"I understand this is an enormous responsibility, protecting the whole universe. But... my friends, Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock... everyone I hold dear... I can't just leave them. Without them I'd just be... me. And I'm nothing by myself. I know you keep trying to say I'm a good person, but I'm nothing without my friends, for all the times things have gone wrong between us they're the best part of my life. And I really don't want to leave them. I just-I just couldn't handle it" Charlie Brown said, stifling a sob.

Charlie Brown's friends were left speechless by these words, it was really quite touching. They were amazed to see how much Charlie Brown really did care for them, for all the times they had treated him badly he considered them the best part of his life. This both inspired more shame in the Peanuts who had been at the wall, while also furthering their resolve to be better friends... but how could they do that if Charlie Brown did have to leave for years?

With everyone's full attention fixed on the floating dog spirit, Sparky carefully contemplated his next words.

"Though I am proud to see how strong the bonds between you and your loved ones are Charlie... there's not much I can do" Sparky began sadly. Charlie Brown lowered his head remorsefully while his friends gasped in outrage "But do not assume that I am being spiteful. If it were up to me you would all be allowed to come along, I'm quite sure you wouldn't say no to the chance to see other worlds. But what would your parents think?"

This managed to shut the kids up for a moment. They all thought about what their parents would think of all this. First they would probably laugh and say their children have some active imaginations, then after seeing Sparky themselves and realising just what sort of predicament Charlie Brown was in, they probably would not want them hanging around him for fear that they may get hurt in all this. The children all grimaced at this thought.

"Now you see" Sparky said solemnly "With my sister returned and the universe in constant need of protection until the day she can be re-imprisoned, there is not much chance for Charlie to visit. And you couldn't come along for the journey because your parents would never allow it. And they are the ones that have authority over you, nothing I say or do can change that. As much as I would like to accommodate your desire to all be together, one happy group of friends, our situation makes it close to impossible. I am truly sorry"

There was a moment of depressing silence. Charlie Brown stared remorsefully between his friends, their sad faces making him feel downright terrible about all this. For a moment he wondered, did he really have to do this? Sparky did say he had a choice about whether he wanted to act as a Guardian. If he didn't want to abandon his friends he wouldn't have to, he could refuse... but that would be wrong. Charlie Brown had already promised himself he would go through with his promise to Sparky, he knew he was putting himself at risk and he had promised himself to see this through. And that just made him feel even worse about having to abandon his friends and family.

"So, how long until..." Freida began, but trailed off, afraid of the answer she would receive. Sparky had a pretty good idea about what she was asking.

"I will give you all some time to be together, let Charlie sort things out between you all. But the Ancients would only allow us to wait a few days for this. All I can say, is that you should appreciate every last second you all have together with him" The ghostly Guardian said wisely.

This last revelation further upset the Peanuts gang. Sally looked imploringly at her brother, silently begging him not to leave her. Charlie Brown responded with an appologetic look, and Sally cried into Linus's shoulder. The blanket carrier did not resist, and even put his arm around her in comfort. He exchanged his own remorseful glance with Charlie Brown, how was he supposed to cope without his best friend? Snoopy was shaking his head and growling, trying his very best to deny everything that was being said. But it wasn't working, and the beagle was soon crying on the ground as Woodstock hugged him. The other Peanuts found it equally difficult to digest the possibility of losing Charlie Brown, the one who had brought them all together.

If not for what came next, they would have indeed been separated from Charlie Brown. He would have had to leave them behind, and they would not have been allowed to take part on his quest to defend the worlds. But I guess sometimes, the most sinister of developments can have some positive outcomes.

Charlie Brown noticed Marcie stand up and saw her mouth move... but no sound came out. Charlie Brown's eyebrows rose in surprise, and he quickly realised that all sound in the room had been extinguished. But before he could even comprehend this unsettling occurance, he expienced a sudden pain in his head. And this wasn't like a plain old headache or anything, this was complete, excrusiating pain! Charlie Brown screamed out in agony, clutching his head in his hands and collapsing onto his knees as the pain spread, and from his point of view the room became cloaked in a sinister dark haze.

The Peanuts all stared on in shock as Charlie Brown collapsed, apparently having a fit. In their concern for their friends' safety, they completely missed the fact that Sparky was having a similar experience above them.

Peppermint Patty and Linus rushed to Charlie Brown's side. They had no idea what to do to help him, but did their best to try and comfort him. Eventually the pains stopped, and Charlie Brown's vision

returned to normal, though he was still very shaken. The kids cautiously approached their downed friend, completely surrounding him. Charlie Brown shook his head and tried to get up, but fell and was caught by Peppermint Patty. The tomboy worked together with Linus to hoist Charlie Brown up and bring him unsteadily to his feet as they supported him.

"What the heck happened?" Shermy asked, bewildered and terrified. Charlie Brown ignored the worries of his friends and looked upwards at Sparky, who returned his terrified stare with a horrified grimace.

"Did you feel it?" Charlie Brown asked. Sparky nodded, and everyone looked up at the dog spirit.

"I did indeed. A great surge of darkness" Sparky replied dramatically "Which means..."

"My sister's forces have arrived on this world"

* * *

><p>This next scene opens in a far off part of town. In this neighbourhood, the usual quaintness and friendly atmosphere of most of Birchwood was practically nonexistent, replaced by an atmosphere of depression. Any resident who had the displeasure of wandering into this part of town would suddenly feel a chill go up their spine, there was just something really creepy about this place.<p>

It was no secret that the edge of town was a haven for the criminal element. Right under the noses of the police, drug dealing, prostitution and mob dealings took place in this neighbourhood. Most everyone knew this, but the police could never catch anyone in the act. And while most sensible people knew to stay away from here, sadly, business was booming.

There were a few residential houses in this neighbourhood, but most were old and abandoned, and some run down and crumbling to dust. Under the shade of a dilapidated gas station, we find two of Birchwood's most notorious young delinquents, Joe Agate and Thibault.

The two had long made this gas station their hangout, Joe's dad was a big player in the criminal underworld, and had even let his son do a bit of drug dealing for him, so the boys were safe here. It was rather handy when they wanted to discuss scams and bullying tactics without being overheard.

Thibault, having been ordered to spy on the Peanuts by Joe Agate, was telling the green capped boy about how he saw Charlie Brown surrounded by an aura of light, floating off the ground, and how the translucent figure of a purple, white robed dog had appeared above him, declaring Charlie Brown the Guardian of Light and leading the gang away. Needless to say, Joe just cocked a brow and laughed sarcastically.

"Sure 'Bo, whatever you say" Joe snickered, Thibault frowned and gritted his teeth in frustration.

"It's true I tell you, Charlie Brown was glowing and floating in the

air!" Thibault roared.

"Suuure" Joe sang "And Freddie Fabulous is a computer geek"

"You think I'd lie about something like this?!" Thibault growled, his anger growing with each passing second "I'm telling you, something freaky is going on with Charlie Brown, and his little Peanuts gang is in on it. They're conspiring to something, I just know it" Thibault said madly. Joe rolled his eyes and chuckled.

"Either you've been drinking your dad's beer again or you've been watching too much Fox news. Either way, you've gone completely mental" Joe commented.

"I'M NOT DRUNK! AND I'M NOT MAD! EVERYTHING I SAY IS TRUE, IT IS!" Thibault screamed in a voice that could contend even with Charlotte Braun's shouting. Joe held his ears for a few seconds afterwards before chortling once more at his friend.

"Get real Thibault. I might actually believe you, if anything you said was plausible. But come on, this isn't a cartoon, or some trashy comic strip, this is reality. No one just floats off the ground and glows, and a talking dog? You know as well as I do that's a retarded idea. And seriously, Charlie Brown, a "Guardian of light"? If nothing else, THAT should be a dead give-away that everything you've tried to explain to me is just a product of your surprisingly wild imagination" Joe Agate explained plainly. Thibault scoffed.

"I know what I saw, and even if it should be impossible it DID happen" Thibault insisted. After a moments thought, he questioned "Aren't you curious about what this all means though? I thought you of all people would be interested in knowing if Charlie Brown's involved in some sort of magical mystery"

Joe turned away from Thibault for a moment, picking up a dart lying on a broken stand and twirling it around in his hand. It was true, despite his refusal to believe Thibault's ludicrous claims, he was secretly suspicious of Charlie Brown's present actions. The bully had harboured a massive grudge on Brown for five years now, after that stay at summer camp where Charlie Brown had actually managed to beat him at a game of marbles. Joe had tried shrugging it off at first, but he never really got over the loss. How could he, when losing to a blockhead like Brown made him the laughing stock of the town for three years afterwards. It had taken many beatings, noogies, wedgies and swirlies to make people stop teasing him over losing to Charlie Brown. And even now that he had secured his place as the number one bully in Birchwood, the loss still left a bitter taste in his mouth.

He had tried many times to get back at Charlie Brown for humiliating him. He and a few cohorts had beaten the boy up on several occasions when Peppermint Patty or Linus weren't around to defend him, taken his lunch money, and of course he had fanned the flames of social exclusion, making Brown the undisputed outcast of Birchwood middle school. But it wasn't enough, no matter what he still couldn't wash away the failure. He still couldn't get over his defeat at the hands of the worlds biggest blockhead.

Angered by these thoughts Joe turned to face a wall with a dartboard, in the middle of which a picture of Charlie Brown's face had been

pinned up. He threw the dart he was holding, it struck the picture of Brown dead in the eye. Agate breathed deeply and exhaled.

"If Brown were involved in some sort of magic scandal I'd be very interested in knowing about it" Joe confessed, pleasing Thibault. Before the boy added "But it's not happening. There's no way anything your saying is true"

"Au contraire"

The two bullies jumped in surprise at the unfamiliar voice. They turned to the doorway (The door just barely hanging onto it's rusty hinges) to find a man wearing a mostly red jacket and black trousers, who's body was shaped suspiciously like an egg. The man wore blue glasses, had a big pink nose, and a nice mustache, though no hair anywhere else on his head. The boys glared at the man, who sent them a wide and sinister grin.

"Hey, fatso, this is our turf! Get the fudge out!" Thibault spat. The egg man did a double take and glared at Thibault with utmost fury.

"What did you call me you little-" The man stopped himself, remembering his orders and trying hard not to lose his temper, as he so often did. With a deep breath, and a hateful look at the short teen, the mystery man stood up straight in a dignified position and said "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Dr Eggman, I come here from the distant planet of Mobius. I'm here on a mission to track down a certain someone, and I couldn't help but overhear your most intriguing conversation from three blocks away"

Joe and Thibault exchanged uncertain looks. This guy was an alien? Sure, he looked like a complete weirdo, but they couldn't trust the word of anyone who they met at the edge of town.

"And what is so interesting about what we're saying?" Joe asked. He thought he might as well hear more of what this doctor said before labeling him a complete wackjob.

Eggman smiled devilishly. He wandered around the crumbling gas station, taking in the unruly sights and smells, and sat down on an old lawnchair Thibault had brought in a few weeks ago.

"Well, let's just say from what I've heard, this, Charlie Brown, is it? He sounds like he may be just the guy I'm looking for" Eggman replied. The boys' eyebrow's reached the tops of their heads, now officially curious.

"So, you believe me that Brown was glowing and floating in the air?" Thibault asked hopefully, he would be pleased to know that someone believed him.

"Yes, but it was the part about the translucent purple dog that really sold me" Eggman answered, extracting a bottle of some green liquid and taking a sip from it.

Thibault grinned deviously, poked Joe's nose and cheered "HA!" Joe Agate merely punched him in the face, sending him down to the ground, and eyed Eggman suspiciously.

"So you actually believe all that?"

"My boy, I've seen things a MILLION times weirder than what your friend has witnessed" Eggman said jovially, placing the bottle of green liquid down on the cracked counter "Yes, I believe him. Because that purple dog is exactly the reason I'm here"

Thibault got up and laughed over how he was right, while Joe just gave Eggman a look that said he'd better start explaining himself.

"I can see you're still sceptical boy, so allow me to explain. Firstly, I am a renowned evil scientist back on my own world. For the past five years now I've been trying to conquer the planet of Mobius with my army of robots, but all my attempts have been thwarted by that pesky blue hedgehog Sonic" Eggman clenched his fist and gritted his teeth at the mention of his rival "Oh how I loathe him, that blue blur has messed up every one of my plans since he was ten years old! That speedy little pest never lets me win. I AM A GENIUS, my I.Q is 300, the highest of any man in the world, I have an army of loyal drones, and I've constantly summoned mystical evils to aid my goals. HOW DO I KEEP LOSING TO HIM!?"

Joe and Thibault stared strangely as the mad scientist rambled on about how Sonic kept messing up his plans. Joe quickly grew annoyed and shouted "Can we get to the point sometime this century!?"

Eggman was briefly stunned by Joe's outburst, and though furious at having been interrupted he grudgingly agreed to save his rant for later.

"Well, anyway, during my most recent attempt to defeat Sonic and take over the world I used a time travelling mechanism called the Time Eater, to distabilise time in my world and bring back a past version of myself to help defeat Sonic. But with the aid of his own past self, Sonic beat me again" Eggman said, looking quite bitter "As a result of the Time Eater's destruction, I was hurled into a realm that exists between time and space, with no one but my whiny past self for company"

Joe and Thibault nodded as the scientist went along. There were a lot of things they were uncertain of, such as how something as small as a hedgehog could defeat an army of robots Eggman supposedly commanded, and this whole time business sounded like something out of a cartoon. But they still listened to what the man had to say.

"Undoubted by my failure, and not wanting to sit around bickering with classic me for the rest of eternity, I set off to explore the strange dimension I'd been trapped in. Considering I'm in a relative hurry, I'll skip most of the details and say I ended up releasing an extremely powerful Dark Witch. Her brother, the dog you saw young man, was the Guardian of Light and tried to seal her away again... but she killed him. But unfortunately he escaped from our clutches, and his powers were sent off to be granted to a chosen hero, who would become the new Guardian of Light. Are you still following me?"

Joe and Thibault's utterly bewildered expressions told Eggman they hadn't really understood most of that, but considering the threats the Witch had made if he failed at his task he decided to continue

regardless.

"Anyway, The Witch sent me, her greatest desciple here because she could sense her brother's power in this world. I have been granted the task of finding the new Guardian of Light, the greatest threat to the Dark Witch's goal of universal domination. So, tell me. Who is the new Guardian of Light?" Eggman asked. Joe and Thibault were still a tad lost on the finer details of the scientists story, but they had gotten the gist of it.

"Charlie Brown? A Guardian of Light? What does that even mean anyway?" Joe asked furiously.

"It means he will have extraordinary powers over the light. His strength and abilities will be near on-par with the Gods. Which is why I need to find him and make sure he does not get in the way of our plans. But first, I need to know just what I'm up against, so tell me about this Charlie Brown" Eggman said, leaning back casually in the armchair "What species is he? Hedgehog, Fox, do you have more than one echidna here?"

Joe and Thibault exchanged odd looks, the latter spun a finger around his head to indicate Eggman was crazy.

"He's human" Joe replied dryly. Eggman raised an... oh wait, he didn't have eyebrows, but he does have lines over his eyes where his eyebrows should have been. How do I say that though? Oops, I'm writing my thoughts into the story aren't I? Sorry folks, back to the plot.

"Ah right, this world doesn't have anthropomorphic talking animals" Eggman said to himself, remembering a conversation he'd had with the Witch about this world "Ok then, so what's this Charlie like? Is he a great hero?" The evil scientist was surprised when the two boys broke out in hysterical laughter.

"Charlie Brown? A hero? Bwa ha ha!" Thibault guffawed.

"That blockhead is the exact OPPOSITE of a hero! He's weak, he's meek, he's pathetic, he's bald, he's stupid, he's a complete loser and can't do a SINGLE THING RIGHT. He's a complete and utter failure!" Joe said savagely. Eggman looked stunned.

"Seriously?" Eggman said thoughtfully "Yeesh, you'd think the Guardian of Light would have higher stands in choosing a successor. But I can't complain, this just makes things a lot easier for me"

Thibault and Joe finally stopped laughing over Charlie Brown's pathetic nature and continued to look uncertainly at Eggman.

"So, basically you're here to kill Charlie Brown, right?" Joe asked, quite hopefully.

"Oh heavens no! I don't kill people, oh no. I may be a mad scientist, but even I have my morals" Eggman said defensively. The two bullies "Awww"ed in dissapointment "Besides, if I did kill him it would release his power and a new guardian would be chosen, which could result in even MORE problems for The Witch and myself. No, I am merely here to capture him and take him to my mistress, so she can

deal with him herself. Which brings me to my next question, where can I find this Charlie Brown?"

"Well, his house is in the Pinetree Corners district, number 07" Thibault replied. Eggman smiled and shot to his feet.

"Very good" Eggman said. He then practically hopped in the direction of the door, startling the two bullies "Well, thank you gentlemen for all your help, I'll just be-"

"Aren't you forgetting something, Ivo?!"

The bullies and mad scientist all jumped at the voice, which was high, cold and hazy. Eggman came to a very sudden stop, shivering with fright. While Joe and Thibault were looking around urgently for the source of the voice, the mad scientist reached into his coat and pulled out a black, sinisterly styled mirror.

"Yes, dear Witch?" Eggman said nervously into the mirror. Joe and Thibault stopped looking around and turned their attention to the mirror in Eggman's hand, realizing that the voice must have come from there.

"You've forgotten, haven't you" The voice spoke again, now in an accusing tone to Eggman "You forgot to find a suitable warrior to wield my power. A warrior to strike down my brother's chosen one, and bring him to me" The voice paused for a short while as Eggman looked down in utmost fear at the mirror "... Or perhaps you thought to defy me? Perhaps you thought you'd use my powers yourself, like I demanded you not do?"

"Of course not, my master" Eggman said quickly, suddenly short on breath "I-it's just that-I thought, maybe... maybe, since this boy sounds so weak and vulnerable, I could-"

"You thought you could defeat him yourself with one of your robots" The voice finished. Eggman nodded weakly, and Joe and Thibault heard a scoff come from the mirror "Foolish mortal! It does not matter if this Charlie Brown is a pathetic, worthless failure. He still has my brother's power, and although no one of his description could ever be capable of utilising it to it's full potential, he would still be more than powerful enough to defeat you! No, you must find me a dark warrior!"

"But, my dear Witch... who?" Eggman implored "From what information I've gathered, the people of this world are both primitive and relatively powerless. And there's precious little time to scour any other worlds for a prime warrior of darkness. Where can I find someone?"

"Try looking directly in front of you" The Witch's voice stubbornly commanded. Eggman looked over the mirror at Joe Agate and Thibault, still staring at him in wonder and looking surprisingly innocent for people of their character. Eggman facefaulted and looked incredulously at the mirror.

"You mean shrimp boy over there?" Eggman asked, to which Thibault made a noise like an angry bull.

"NO! NOT SARGENT CHAUVANIST! The other boy..." The Witch elaborated.

Eggman gave another look at Joe Agate, who shot him a nasty glare in return. Eggman hummed and scratched his chin, as though thoughtful. But he was also highly sceptical. "Show me the boy" The evil voice commanded. Eggman knew he had to comply and turned the mirror around so the two bullies could see the reflection in it... but no, it was not their reflection, but the shadowy face of the Dark Witch!

Thibault jumped back in shock and fell on his rear at the sight of the Witch in the mirror, but Joe Agate refused to show fear and merely stared at the mirror with a grim expression. The Dark Witch stared back at him through the looking glass, her ruby eyes twinkling malevolently.

"Yes" The Witch's voice echoed, her hideous purple mouth opened in a wide grin as she looked into Joe's eyes, into his very soul "So... nasty. So... manipulative. Such hatred, such loathing, such cunning, brutality and desire for true power... so much potential for darkness"

As the Witch's reflection spoke Thibault and Eggman both looked at Joe in a most cautious manner. Joe for one was starting to feel quite weird. He could feel something not quite right in his head, and he got the feeling that whatever this Dark Witch was, she was reading his mind. This thought quickly gained the ire of the bully.

"Get out of my head you creep!" Joe screamed, covering his forehead and glaring viciously at the Witch's image. Eggman shuddered and frantically motioned for him to stop. But the Witch's face simply split into an even wider, more disgusting grin.

"And he can resist my mind reading powers too" The Witch cackled jovially "If that's not a sign of an iron will, I don't know what is! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha"

Thibault shook his head and stared uncertainly between Joe and the Witch's face in the mirror. Eggman started fiddling with the fingers in his free hand. He had a good idea where the Witch was going, but couldn't quite see her reasoning. Joe for his part was still trying to figure out what the Dark Witch was getting at.

"Just what do you want you... whatever you are?" Joe asked grudgingly. The Dark Witch's hands came into the mirrors frame, and she intertwined them in a calculating manner.

"What I want is complete and utter universal domination" The Witch said plainly "I want to shroud the entire realm of light in my own darkness, I want to free the people of yours and all other worlds of their retched consciousness. But to do that, this Charlie Brown of yours must first be killed. And my dear boy, I want you to do it"

Joe raised an eyebrow, and then smirked.

"Go on" He said with a friendly wave. The Witch grinned wider, it was working.

"I have seen your heart Joe Agate... and I like what I see. You have a great darkness in you my boy, the kind that needs to be nurtured and encouraged to bloom. You are not meant to reside here, in this

acursed Realm of Light. Dear Joe, I can offer you everything your heart desires" The Witch said craftily, Joe Agate hanging on to her every word "I can give you the power to control darkness itself. I can teach you to crush mountains, destroy worlds, slay all who wrong you. And in exchange for aiding me in my plans, I can make you an heir. Second in command of my Dark Empire, and secondary ruler of the entire universe! And all you have to do is live your greatest desire, and exact revenge on the boy who wronged you. I ask you to defeat Charlie Brown, bring him to me so I may seal away his powers, and then, I will allow you to be the one who ends the boy's life"

At this point Thibault and Eggman were both overcome with chills over the downright evilness of the Witch's request. As for Joe, the bully smiled widely at the prospects.

"What do you say then?" The Witch asked, already knowing the answer from the look on the boy's face.

"What do I say?" Joe repeated humourously "I say you got yourself a done deal Witch"

The Dark Witch's cackles echoed throughout the old gas station, her laugh was so horrifying and creepy it could scare all the hair off a cat. Thibault was staring in absolute bewilderment at Joe and the mirror, feeling quite bitter and jealous of his partner in delinquency. And as for Eggman...

"Are you mad woman!" The Doctor yelled into the mirror, forgetting for a moment who he was talking too "You won't let me inherit your power, but you'll have me give it to some punk kid? That makes absolutely no sense, it's crazy! He'll never pull it off!" The reflection of the Witch scowled evilly at Eggman, who suddenly regained his sense of self and held the mirror as far back from him as he could "I'm sorry, dear Witch, I meant-"

"I know, I know!" The Witch groaned "Maybe it does seem foolish to your mortal mind. But look at him Ivo, his heart is filled to the brim with darkness. He is crafty, manipulative and downright dangerous if given the power to do some real damage. And best of all, he already has a reason to want to kill the new guardian. A better choice we'll not likely find on this world, and you said yourself that we have no time to scour other worlds for a warrior. Give him the sphere of darkness"

Not wanting to bring about the Witch's full wrath when he returned to her realm Eggman nervously nodded and reached into his jacket. The young bullies watched closely as he extracted a medium sized wooden box that, in all logical sense, should not have fit into his coat. Joe gave the Witch a curious look, to which she responded with a look that plainly said "Wait and see"

After extracting a key from the same pocket he had pulled the box out from, Eggman open the box to reveal... an orb of pure, swirling darkness!

"... 'The hell!" Thibault gasped, not believing what he was seeing. hovering just above the box in Eggman's hand was a sphere the size of a basketball made up of pure darkness. To his poor mind, that was just WAY too weird for him to fully comprehend.

"You want power, Joe Agate? You want the chance to take revenge on Charlie Brown, the chance to put your feelings of inadequacy to rest?" The Dark Witch's reflection began craftily "Then reach out and accept half of my own great power! Reach out and accept YOUR DESTINY!"

"A little melodramatic, but oh well" Eggman muttered under his breath so no one would hear him. But...

"I am not melodramatic you oval swine!" The Dark Witch snarled, making Eggman do a double take and mentally slap himself, since he no longer had a free hand to do so physically.

Joe ignored the blundering of the evil scientist and stared at the ball of darkness in contemplation. For a moment his rational mind tried to steer him clear of the path he was being asked to take. He didn't know if he could really trust these freaks for starters, and he had never stooped so low as to actually try and murder someone before. But then again... it was Charlie Brown he was supposed to kill. And the Witch was probably right in saying it would help him finally get over his humiliating defeat, and put his greatest enemy in his well deserved tomb.

With a dark smile Joe began to reach out his hand to-

"Hey, wait a minute!" Thibault suddenly screamed, gaining everyone's attention "I want in on this whole bad guy, darkness whatever business too. Don't I get any powers!?"

The Witch's face moved in a manner suggesting she was raising an eyebrow, and then she burst out laughing. But not a mirthful laugh, a dry and grim laugh.

"And why should I squander my powers on a pathetic, sexist little short ass like you?" The Dark Witch asked rudely. Thibault's face turned red and he looked ready to fire back a retort before Joe elbowed him in the gut and told him to be quiet.

"He's a thoughtless, stupid little blockhead, but he is resourceful. I'm sure he'd be of some use to you" Joe told the Witch in the mirror. The Dark Witch stared contemplatively at Thibault for a moment, then stuck her tongue out and groaned.

"Oh fine. But I ain't sharing any of my powers with him! If he wants power, he can have whatever power he wants from some other world" The Witch replied. Thibault looked torn between gleeful and furious at Joe's rude method of standing up for him.

And so, without further ado, Joe Agate reached out his hand and touched the sphere of darkness.

The effect was almost instant. The darkness comprising the orb ceased swirling in a complete circle and began circling around Joe's hand, moving up his arm before coating his entire body in darkness. Thibault gasped in shock while Eggman merely stood back and took cover behind the run down counter, just to be safe. The darkness continued to circle Joe's body for a full minute, before finally it began to sink in through his skin...

A long moment of silence followed. Joe stood limp on the spot, his

head lowered so neither Thibault nor Eggman could see his face. The lesser bully and mad scientist leaned closer for a better look, the latter worrying something might have gone wrong.

Then suddenly Joe's head snapped up, an evil grin plastered across his face and his eyes quickly turning from black beads to ruby red. Without warning Joe raised his hand and shot a beam of dark energy from his palm, creating a massive hole in the ceiling. Thibault ducked under the counter with Eggman to avoid the falling debris, and both watched on in horror as the Agate boy floated ten feet into the air, laughing maniacally, and shot bolts of black lightning from all ten fingertips. The dark lighting obliterated the walls, ceiling and everything else it touched. In less than a moment, Joe had reduced the gas station and everything in it to dust, leaving only Thibault and Eggman untouched.

The two cowards shuddered on the floor as Joe Agate maliciously examined his handiwork. The young teen stared down at his hands, both covered in darkness, grinning like a psychopath as he imagined all the "Wonderful" things he could do with this unimaginable power.

From within the mirror still in Eggman's hand, the Dark Witch smiled. Victory had almost been achieved.

"You like this power, Joe?" The Witch asked kindly. Joe laughed.

"Like it? I love it!" Joe cheered, blasting a foreclosed home nearby with a beam of darkness, so that it collapsed upon itself. The Witch cackled with him.

"Yes, destroying things is fun isn't it. And I assure you, you'll have plenty more things to destroy. After you bring me Charlie Brown" The Witch said importantly.

"No sweat" Joe said, quite cocky "I'll go get him now. You might have to wait a little while though, I might take the time to rough him up a bit"

"Not yet" The Witch said plainly. Joe Agate stared at her reflection in shock, and outrage.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN NOT NOW? I WANNA KILL BROWN"

"And you will, after bringing him to me first of course. But for now you must come meet me in my world, the Realm of Darkness. For as worthless and weak as Charlie Brown may be, you still require a few training sessions before I can let you battle anyone. But don't worry, it won't take long. And when we're done I promise you'll be able to do whatever you want to ol' Charlie Brown" The Witch replied deviously. Joe Agate's creepy grin returned in full force, and he nodded in acceptance.

"Right, if everything's sorted, time for lesson number one: Opening dark portals" The Witch announced. Joe stared questioningly at her and she explained "Hold both your arms in front of you, and mentally command a portal of darkness to appear and, also mentally, state exactly where you want it to lead to. For this first test you can just open it to anywhere in the Realm of Darkness, I'll find you

easily. Ivo, make sure you follow him. And you too kid, since you insist on joining us"

Joe grinned at this prospect and did as he was instructed. He held out his hands, and a vortex of black and purple energy opened up before the three villains.

"I must confess, the boy is a natural" Eggman admitted to the Witch's reflection. The Dark Witch grinned boastfully.

"Of course he is, I'm never wrong" The Witch snidely commented.

Thibault examined the portal cautiously as Joe Agate stood behind him. Feeling pretty scared but not willing to admit it, he turned around and told his friend "You first" In a pleasant tone. Joe responded by pushing him by the head into the portal, his screams echoing across the street for a brief moment before he vanished into darkness. Unphased by his own actions Joe stepped into the portal next. Eggman hesitated for a brief moment. Despite all his uncertainty though, he was wearing a most confident smirk as he too entered the portal with the mirror. The vortex vanished seconds afterwards, leaving behind nothing but the smouldering remains of the gas station.

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Alright, that's a rap. I'm still not pleased with the first half of the chapter, I couldn't write properly for SOOOO many characters at once so most of them don't have a lot of lines, which is a real pity because Peanuts has such a colourful and fun cast. They'll have more to do in the next chapter though. I've made another change to this opening arc. Because the training scenes are proving to take more time than I expected I've decided to do another chapter for those scenes before moving on to the climax of this opening arc. Plus, I wanted to update at least one story this month incase Christmas got in the way of my writing, so it all works out. I must say the scene with the villains was definitely my favourite part to write, a lot more jokes than in previous chapters and it's fun to sometimes focus on the characters that aren't so likeable. Joe Agate will be the co-main villain of this story, serving the Dark Witch as her most loyal soldier, gathering up villains from across the many franchises and battling Charlie Brown. Thibault and several other more minor Peanuts characters will appear as recurring villains too, mostly Thibault, but most of their roles will not be nearly as big as Joe's. I'm glad to finally have a little cross-series interaction with that scene between Eggman and the bullies, personally I don't know if I did a good or a terrible job at writing Eggman here, but I still had lots of fun writing him. Ok, hope you all enjoyed this chapter, only two more to go until the plot really kicks off!

5. Your Training Begins, Charlie Brown

**Tiger Lover 16: Hello again folks. Been a while hasn't it. Sorry I haven't updated anything in so long, a lot has happened. My mum was in hospital a few weeks after Christmas, college has been a nightmare, I've had writers block, and I've actually got most of the finale to this arc written. Along those lines I've decided to split

the big battle next chapter into two separate chapters, since it would be over 45000 words otherwise, and this chapter's already long enough. I'll release the first of these two chapters tomorrow probably, but don't hold your breaths for the next one after that. This chapters mostly just set up and Charlie Brown training to use his powers, I admit I made most of this up as I went along and it went on waaaaay longer than I thought it would, so forgive me if it seems dragged out in parts. Well, I have more to say, but I'll leave that for the end. Just enjoy the chapter.**

* * *

><p>Chapter 4: Your training begins, Charlie Brown

Back in Charlie Brown's house, the Peanuts gang were in a panic. The news that an Evil Witch had sent what could possibly be a whole army of dark creatures into their town was enough to scare anyone out of their wits. But considering they all knew it was their friend/brother/owner they were undoubtedly after, the kids couldn't help but explode with worry.

"We're doomed!" Pigpen yelled, jumping under the coffee table as Violet and Patty ran around it.

"Call the army! Call the Marines! Call James Bond!" Shrieked Lucy, running around frantically.

Sparky and Charlie Brown were trying to calm the terrified teens and pre teens. The former was having little luck because people just ran through him, and the latter was himself too shocked and afraid to say anything truly calming.

On the sidelines stood Woodstock, the only one in the room either not running around screaming or trying desparately to find a hiding place. The tiny bird was a bit frightened by the screams of panic the kids were all making, so he decided to put an end to it by pulling out a megaphone from the compartment underneath the Brown family's television. He flipped the switch, breathed deeply and then tweeted as loud as he could into the devise.

The nearly supersonic screech quickly shut everyone up, while also causing everyone in the room to fall on their knees clutching their heads, their eardrums all thumping like mad.

"What's that crazy bird trying to do, blow our heads off!?" Peppermint Patty complained. Grinning with satisfaction despite her fury, Woodstock made to put the megaphone away while Sparky took advantage of the momentary cease-panic to address the group.

"Listen, I know you are all frightened by the prospect of my sister's minions, but stressing out isn't going to get us anywhere" Sparky began plainly. The kids nodded, taking a moment to calm down further.

"But what are we supposed to do if she did send someone here to kill us? It's not like Charlie Brown can defend us, he doesn't even know how to use his stupid powers" Violet retorted, momentarily resumig her critical stance.

"I agree" Sparky nodded. Charlie Brown stared incredulously at him "No offence to you Charlie, but having all my powers does you no good if you haven't yet been taught how to use them"

Charlie Brown nodded, agreeing that what Sparky said was actually a fair judgement and not lack of faith. Sparky turned back to the other children.

"Now, as I previously stated I had intended to wait before taking Charlie away to be trained, but under these circumstances I'm afraid we must make haste. If my sister has sent Doctor Eggman or a squad of her heartless then she is likely to succeed in capturing Charlie. But there is another matter of equal concern: the safety of the rest of you. If my sister's forces catch you here, or discover that you are of importance to Charlie then she will have you all imprisoned... and she will most definitely turn you all into heartless at some point" Sparky explained gravely. The gang all gulped, clutching the point of their chests where their hearts would be.

"So, what are we supposed to do to defend ourselves?" Schroeder asked. Sparky sighed, taking a short moment to contemplate his options. He didn't have much time though, so there was only one course of action that seemed reasonable at the moment.

"For the time being you shall all have to accompany Charlie Brown and myself to the Light Palace, my home in the White Space. It is the safest place to be at the moment" Sparky answered. Despite the fear and uncertainty that still plagued the Peanuts, this news actually cheered them up slightly. It meant they would have a little more time with Charlie Brown, some time to help set things right with him. Plus, they all really wanted to see a world besides their own.

"Will there be snacks?" Snoopy asked the dog spirit.

"Yes, plenty of snacks Snoopy" Sparky said. Being a dog himself he completely understood Snoopy's thoughts. The beagle hopped around excitedly at this confirmation.

"So, what do we do when we're in this White paste?" Asked Sally, earning a groan from her friends.

"It's White Space, Sally" Marcie patiently corrected.

"I knew that" Sally added quickly, to eye rolls from the gang.

"She does strike up a good point though" Charlie Brown began, trying to sound fair "What do we all do when we're there?"

"We can discuss that in a moment, we don't know what my sister might be up to so we can't afford to waste any more time waiting here. Although I will ask, where are your parents?" Sparky asked.

"They're out of town. They went on a week long fishing trip with all the other parents and left my brother in charge of the house" Sally replied...

...

Sparky stared blankly at Sally, seemingly dumbfounded by her response.

"Seriously?" Sparky asked, his eyebrows sky high and his voice so full of surprise it had turned squeaky. Sally nodded. Sparky's eyes drifted momentarily between the other Peanuts, and they all gave their own nods of confirmation.

"Your parents actually left you, kids that haven't even properly reached puberty, all by yourselves for a week. And did they arrange any adult supervision for you?" Sparky asked incredulously, only to receive a snort from Patty.

"Our parents are almost never around, you hardly even notice that they exist" The girl in the orange dress explained. Sparky's bewilderment manifested into a really funny look on his face, with his jaw fallen and his eyes squinted.

"No offense, but your parents are all very irresponsible" Sparky said plainly. No one was offended really.

As Sparky regained his composure Charlie Brown cautiously asked "How do we get to the Light Palace"

"Simple. As the Guardian of Light you are the only one besides the Ancients who can access the Light Palace. To allow us entrance you must summon a portal" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown hesitated, grinning nervously in an attempt to look capable but a bit uncertain of his ability to do what was being asked.

"Well go on then, the bad guys could be here any second!" Lucy yelled, and Charlie Brown realised he must have been staring blankly into space for a minute.

"Erm, ok... how do I do that?" Charlie Brown asked. Sparky's immediate response was to lower himself down on top of Charlie, seemingly being absorbed into his head. The Peanuts stepped back and gasped over this occurrence. Charlie Brown himself was shocked, he patted his head cautiously while looking upwards for any sign of the Guardian spirit.

"Since this is your first time using your powers I shall guide you" Sparky's voice rang in Charlie Brown's ear. The bald looking boy jumped in fright and looked around. After asking his friends it became apparent that only he had heard Sparky.

'Um, ok' Charlie Brown thought, not wanting to speak incase he made himself look crazy.

"Now, accessing your power is actually quite simple. First, focus on the happiest thoughts or memories you can. Then you should feel a sudden rush of energy. To summon a portal, command that energy into your hands, hold them out directly in front of you and, with your thoughts, command a portal of light to appear. As the portal springs up you must focus completely on where you want it to lead. Since you have never been to the light palace my thoughts shall guide you in locating it. Do you understand?" Sparky asked.

'Um... I think' Charlie Brown replied half-heartedly.

"Good enough. Now, take your time, don't worry. Just be sure to concentrate" Sparky said seriously.

Charlie Brown gulped, unconfidence building up inside him, and the confused stares of his friends making him even more uncomfortable. Charlie Brown tried to clear his thoughts of all but the happiest he had.

"Now... what thought would be happy enough?" Charlie Brown asked himself. He thought hard for a good happy memory, but bad thoughts and unfortunate outcomes kept popping up the harder he thought. With an annoyed sigh he tried to make up a happy thought. He imagined himself pitching a no hitter at baseball and his team lifting him up, chanting his name. He didn't feel any rush of power, probably because he then had a sour feeling of "Why can't that be true?"

He tried to imagine himself flying a kite successfully while the Kite Eating Tree looked on in envy... but then sprang forth the mental image of the tree leaned forward and snatching the kite out of the air, gobbling it up. Charlie Brown groaned, thinking harder for good thoughts.

'Come on, I must have had some good fortune' Charlie Brown thought irritably. Then several ideas suddenly popped up in his head.

The Motocross race where he had beaten both Peppermint Patty and Snoopy to first place, the marbles game with Joe Agate and Rerun's subsequent thanks and admiration, his brief stay with the Goose Eggs, who respected him as a wise elder and wished to grow up like him, the time he won the school spelling bee and his friends sung "Champion Charlie Brown" (He also tried very hard not to think about the following botched attempt at the National Spelling bee) and the joy he felt when Snoopy came back after briefly leaving to live with Lila (Again, he tried to ignore what came straight after). These were all happy memories for him, any of them would probably do!

Charlie Brown focused intently on these happy memories, pushing out all negative thoughts and allowing the happy moments to take over. The good feelings flowed through Charlie Brown's mindscape, granting him, for the first time in ages, a feeling of complete warmth and cheerfulness.

And then it happened. As soon as Charlie Brown's happy thoughts took over, a strange sensation occurred all throughout his body. Suddenly he felt powerful, more powerful than he could ever have imagined. He felt like he could lift a building, run a hundred miles without getting tired. A foreign sense of confidence sprung up in Charlie Brown's mind, and suddenly he felt, with this new power he would be able to accomplish anything.

"I see you have summoned forth your inner light" Sparky's voice said approvingly. Charlie Brown smiled and nodded, which worried some of his friends "Don't get too excited. The feeling when first accessing your powers is most uplifting, but you can't allow yourself to be consumed by happiness. Remember, you will be expected to use these powers to fight dangerous foes, you cannot do so standing still with a big wide grin on your face"

Again Charlie Brown nodded, even though he knew Sparky was inside his mind and couldn't actually see him nod. Though feeling a little

disappointed by the command to not feel too happy, since this so called inner light was really perking him up, he held his hands up in front of him and followed Sparky's previous instructions.

The Peanuts watched anxiously as Charlie Brown mentally commanded this new power into his hands. To everyone's shock, not least his own, Charlie Brown's hands began to glow with a mystical light.

"Don't be too surprised though, you need to keep your thoughts as pleasant as possible to keep control of your powers" Sparky instructed, and Charlie Brown went back to thinking of how Milo and the Goose Eggs practically idolised him "Not easy, I know, but in time it'll become easier. Now, while your hands are still glowing I want you to hold them out and command a portal of light to appear, I will make sure it leads to the Light Palace. Just concentrate"

Charlie Brown nodded one last time and held his glowing hands in front of him. He forced as much of this new power into his hands as possible and commanded a portal to the Light Palace to appear. An image of a marvelous, white and gold room briefly flashed in his mind, and the next second a vortex suddenly sprung up in the room. The Peanuts all gasped and sprang back in shock, Snoopy spat out the tea he had just been drinking while waiting for something to happen, and Charlie Brown fell on his back, taken by surprise despite already being informed of this outcome.

"Ok... I'll admit, that is pretty cool" Lucy said, staring wide eyed at the portal along with everyone else.

Charlie Brown sat up and marveled at the swirling vortex of light he had created. He really didn't think he would get that right the first time, he was sure for a second that he would be standing around here for hours trying to get it right. But here it was, an actual interdimensional portal, leading presumably to the Light Palace Sparky spoke of.

'Wow... gee, maybe I'm not such a bad candidate for this after all' Charlie Brown thought hopefully 'Of course... maybe it's just beginners luck...'

Sparky exited out of Charlie Brown's head and hovered in front of the portal, looking like a doorman waiting to welcome people in.

"Well, there you have it. Now I must again stress that we have no clue how much time we have left to get to safety, so everyone hurry into the light palace" Sparky instructed. The Peanuts all nodded and stepped forward cautiously to enter the portal. But Shermy stopped and complained.

"Wait, why are we just walking aimlessly into a portal? We don't even know if this leads to where it's supposed to" Shermy pointed out, which sparked some worry among the rest of the gang.

"He's right, what if Charlie Brown got the coordinates wrong, or however that works with portals. What if we end up walking into an active volcano or something?" Freida fretted. There was a lot of frightened whispering among the Peanuts, almost all of whom were certain this portal would lead them to their deaths rather than their salvation.

"I assure you this portal leads to the Light Palace, I made sure to choose the location in Charlie Brown's mind" Sparky said clearly. The youngsters all looked to the portal, still pretty nervous.

"I think someone should test it, just to be safe" Violet said.

"Who would be crazy enough to test a portal that might lead to impending doom?" Schroeder asked. Lucy hummed thoughtfully, her eyes focusing on Snoopy for a brief moment.

"I have a volunteer" Lucy piped up, picking up Snoopy and preparing to throw him into the vortex.

"Wait-WAIT" The beagle cried out in his head, but he could do nothing but scream as Lucy tossed him head first into the portal. The Peanuts all stared in open mouthed horror at the portal, and then turned furiously on Lucy.

"What, better the beagle than any of us, right?" Lucy said reasonably.

"I'm afraid I don't see your logic" Sparky responded, slightly irritated.

The Peanuts gang all watched as the vortex continued to spiral endlessly, each worried for the fate of their canine companion. Charlie Brown stood at the front of the group, praying to God, or rather, the Ancients, that his beloved dog was alright. The kids waited for what seemed like an eternity of nothing happening, and then...

Snoopy's head popped out of the centre of the portal. He looked thrilled.

"Woodstock, you have got to see this" Snoopy said directly to his birdy companion before disappearing back through the portal. The kids sighed in relief while Woodstock cheered and excitedly leapt forth into the portal after his friend.

Now knowing it was safe to use this portal, the Peanuts gang lined up one by one to enter it. Of course Lucy fought her way to the front and was the first in, followed shortly by Violet and Patty. Peppermint Patty, Schroeder, Franklin and Rerun went next, followed by each of the kids in turn until only Linus, Charlie Brown and Sparky were left.

"I still can't get my head around all this supernatural weirdness" Linus said while examining the portal. As he began to enter it however he turned back to Charlie Brown and, with a smile, added "But that doesn't mean It's not totally cool"

Charlie Brown had a small smile on his face as he watched his best friend vanish into the vortex.

"How long do you want us all to stay?" Charlie Brown asked.

"When my sister realises you are no longer in this world she'll recall her forces. So tomorrow we'll settle your affairs, inform your parents and be on our way" Sparky answered.

"Oh... ok" Charlie Brown sighed, trying to hide his disappointment.

"I realise this is almost cruel of me to separate you from them, but the fate of the universe comes before anything else" Sparky said, beginning to enter the portal himself. He stopped long enough to add "But the choice is still yours. You don't have to leave if you don't want to"

Charlie Brown watched as Sparky disappeared, leaving him alone in the living room with the portal. He thought briefly over what the Guardian spirit had said and hopped into the vortex. For a split second his vision was obscured by a blinding flash of light, then suddenly his new surroundings became visible.

Charlie Brown gaped in wonder and amazement at the room he was in. This room alone was the size of the entirety of Charlie Brown's house, the walls consisted of fine white marble and were decorated with golden and purple tapestries, paintings and indescribable platinum and silver ornaments. The room was also filled with countless enities such as a flat screen tv the size of a movie screen and several regular sized high definition tvs, every game system and video game known to man, a bookcase that stretched out as far as Charlie Brown's living room and as tall as his house in one corner of the room that held what looked like ten thousand books, several extremely cozy looking couches, beanbags and chairs, a snow cone machine, a music player, a solid platinum piano, several golden tables with a dozen gold chairs each, five platinum refrigerators and a golden grate with purple flames. There were also diamond statues of the seven Ancients scattered around the room, with Arceus's statue of course being the biggest, and there were at least ten golden doors leading to presumably other areas of this palace, each with a diamond doorknob.

Charlie Brown marvelled at the many wonders of this room. He noticed each of his friends were also looking around in amazement, even Violet's mansion of a house was put to shame by this palace. And considering this was only one room of it, that was saying an awful lot.

"Wow! Talk about the lap of luxury" Franklin said, walking past Polokus's statue and admiring the golden silk tapestry depicting what seemed to be Sparky and his sister.

"I never want to leave this place" Pigpen said, hopping onto the first couch he could reach. The resulting dust cloud caused the whole thing to become messy. He picked up the remote lying near by and switched on the grand sized television. The tv turned on to show the movie Wreck It Ralph by Disney.

"This movie's not even finished at the theaters yet" Rerun excitedly pointed out, taking up a seat on a cleaner couch away from Pigpen, along with Freida and Lucy.

Marcie, the bookworm of the group, had immediately made her way over to the bookcase, and was examining the thousands of novels, manuals, autobiography's and every other type of book imaginable. Some of them, like "A History of Magic" by Bathilda Bagshot, and "A Trainer's Guide" she realised must have come from other worlds.

"Incredible" The bespeccled teen said as she began reading a book on Chi spells.

Snoopy and Woodstock, predictably, had headed straight for the nearest platinum refrigerator, which was stocked full of all kinds of delicious delicacies and snacks. And every time they took something out to eat, an exact duplicate of that food item appeared to take its place.

"I have just GOT to get me one of these. I'd never have to wait around all day for supertime to come again, I can have supertime ALL DAY LONG!" Snoopy cheered. He then thought briefly over what he'd said and added "Of course that would make me extremely fat. But it would still be great"

Schroeder walked past Snoopy and Woodstock, now consuming an entire cake and corn cob respectively and downing it with soda. The piano prodigy was of course fascinated by the platinum piano, it was by far the finest instrument he had ever seen in his life.

"Can I play it?" Schroeder asked Sparky, who was watching over the excited children like a loving grandfather.

"Play to your hearts content" The spirit replied. Schroeder squealed like a fangirl and hopped onto the golden stool by the piano, and immediately he began playing some of Beethoven's music.

Charlie Brown watched on as his friends enjoyed themselves with all the luxuries this room had to offer, all clearly forgetting that their lives might possibly have been in danger just a minute ago. Charlie Brown was eager to join them in having fun, but he remembered that Sparky had brought them here for a reason. His friends were here for their own protection, and he was here to train in using his powers.

Charlie Brown approached Sparky and asked "So... what now?"

Sparky gave Charlie Brown a gentle smile.

"Now you may all relax for a moment. In ten minutes I will lead you to the training room, so we may begin your training. Your friends may come watch, if they so wish, otherwise they are free to have fun here in the living room. But don't worry now, as the kids say you should "Take a breather" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown gladly replied and went to sit down on the couch with half of his other friends.

Peppermint Patty and Marcie positioned themselves to either side of Charlie Brown, the latter still half buried in her book while the former held a large bag of popcorn.

"You sure got a sweet deal Chuck, this place is fit for a God" Peppermint Patty said, stuffing her mouth full of popcorn and offering Charlie Brown some. Charlie Brown took out a handful of popcorn as Marcie chimed in.

"Well, technically that's true sir. Sparky explained that as the Guardian of Light he was practically the next step down from the Ancients, and they're Gods"

Peppermint Patty mumbled a reply, but it was impossible to make out what she said through her mouth full of buttery popcorn.

The three friends sat there enjoying the movie on the giant screen (Well, two of them did, Marcie just read on). Charlie Brown wasn't really sure what else to do. He figured that their stay here might be the last time he saw any of his friends for a very long time, and he knew he had better make the most of it. But then again, Sparky had only given him ten minutes to take a break, and that was hardly any time to do anything. He could barely have a good conversation with any of his friends, especially when they were all so engrossed in all the fun things the palace had to offer them. The new Guardian sighed at this thought. But then again, the most important thing was that they were safe and enjoying themselves. He wished they could stay, all these possessions looked like fun, but what good were video games, movies and snow cones if he didn't have friends to enjoy them with?

Charlie Brown noticed a crystal-covered clock on the wall next to the large screen tv and estimated that he had already used up five minutes of his time thinking. With a slight groan and knowing the upcoming training session was bound to be strenuous, Charlie Brown decided the most he could do was enjoy this comfy couch and relax.

While Snoopy and Woodstock rode around the room on an SUV they had found, Sparky flying desperately after them to try and make them stop, Charlie Brown just sat and ate popcorn with Peppermint Patty. Of course there were a few moments where their hands touched and Patty gave Chuck one of her "Sly dog" comments, considering Charlie Brown was a teenager now these comments embarrassed him even more than when he was eight. But he appreciated them nonetheless, he would sure miss these moments in the future.

CRASH!

Charlie Brown and friends jumped at the deafening noise and turned to find the SUV Snoopy had been driving had crashed into the statue of Arceus. Oddly, though perhaps not too surprising, the statue was completely unscratched. The car... not so much.

"That was a birthday gift from those delightful transforming robots too" Sparky sighed as he observed the destroyed vehicle. Linus and Rerun ran forward to pull Snoopy and Woodstock out of the wreckage, the mischief making animals didn't seem at all shocked by the impact, in fact they looked thrilled.

"Sorry about that, Snoopy's just... Snoopy" Charlie Brown couldn't find the right word to describe his imaginative pet. Sparky shook his head nonchalantly.

"Never mind, we can repair the damage later" Sparky waved his ghostly hand "Now, let's discuss present matters. Ten minutes have passed since you all arrived here. So Charlie Brown, do you desire a longer break or should we begin your training?"

While the other Peanuts looked on uncertainly at the mention of training Charlie Brown replied "Well... I'd like to just wait here but... I guess the right thing to do is start training, isn't

it?"

"I'd say so" Sparky nodded approvingly. He noticed the unsure looks on the kids faces and chuckled "I would have thought it obvious that I wanted to start training Charlie Brown to use his powers as soon as possible. Seeing how my sister already feels confident enough to send her minions into the Realm of Light it is imperative that the new Guardian be taught how to drive them out. And since Charlie Brown's already here, why wait?"

There was a collective "Oh" among the gang, all of whom suddenly looked excited.

"So now we get to see my brother shoot lasers and stuff, right?" Sally asked cheerfully while clapping her hands.

"That and more, Sally" Sparky replied, seeming equally as excited as the Peanuts gang. Charlie Brown realised he must have been the only person with butterflies in his stomach over the thought of the upcoming training session.

"Do they have to watch?" Charlie Brown suddenly asked, worrying about making a fool out of himself.

"What are you kidding!? There's no way we're missing more of your light shows, I want to see what your powers can REALLY do" Lucy said determindly. From the firey tone in her voice Charlie Brown knew he wouldn't be able to argue.

Charlie Brown turned expectantly to the former Guardian. Knowing what was on his successor's mind Sparky nodded and hovered towards the golden door besides Exodia's diamond statue.

"The training room is along this hall. I must ask that you all follow me closely, do not wander off. The Light Palace is fifty times larger than the Buckingham palace of your world's England, with thousands of rooms, and many, many doors leading between them, so it is very easy to get lost if you do not possess a map or follow me. Also, several doors in separate hallways actually lead to other worlds, so aimlessly walking through doors here would be an enormous mistake" Sparky forewarned the kids, who marvelled at the scale of this palace.

"Man, are you ever going to get lost living here" Non-peppermint Patty commented to Charlie Brown, who subconsciously nodded.

Being a spirit Sparky did not open the door for the Peanuts, but merely floated through it, poking his hand through the golden door afterwards and gesturing for them to follow. A bit disturbed by that action, Charlie Brown stepped forward and pulled on the diamond knob. After Charlie Brown had lead them through the door, Sparky lead the kids down a hallway with what seemed like hundreds more doors on either side of them.

"Behind these doors you will find rooms such as the kitchen, a laboratory, several bathrooms and shower rooms, a cafe, sports and exercise room, my jewel vault and the library" Sparky explained as the gang walked on through the seemingly never ending hallway.

"Library? What about all those books back in that lounge we were just in?" Peppermint Patty said incredulously.

"Oh, those are just for when I want to do some light reading" Sparky said calmly. Noticing the odd looks he was receiving he added "I have a lot of free time on my hands..."

At last Sparky stopped at a large blue door marked with a punching bag logo. Sparky politely gestured for the kids to step into the room.

Charlie Brown's first opinion of the room behind the door was...
'Huh?'

The supposed training room was completely bare. No weights, no treadmills, no targets, no punching bags, no training or exercise equipment of any kind. Just four white walls and a floor.

"Well, it's got the room. So where's the training?" Lucy immediately quipped when she noticed how empty the room was.

"The room is only empty because it is not presently being used. Whenever one wishes to train here, the room will magically alter to suit their needs. For example..." Sparky cleared his throat and announced to the ceiling "Target session 001"

And out of thin air a trio of targets appeared at the far end of the room.

"Whoa" The kids gasped in amazement.

"Or if you would prefer a nice little jog... Running exercise" At Sparky's word the size of the room expanded, reaching the size of a football stadium. The floor was also recoloured to resemble a racetrack.

"Neat" Complimented Peppermint Patty, an avid runner.

"Or perhaps a little combat training. Heartless battle simulation Level 1" Sparky instructed the room, which suddenly shrank back to its original size and blankness. But that was nothing compared to what happened next.

Five round shadows appeared on the ground before the Peanuts. The kids stared in wonder at the dark patches, and they all recoiled in terror as the shadows began to rise up out of the ground. The shadows contorted into a shape that was very vaguely humanoid, but with sharp claws on its hands and feet and long antennas growing from the head. Finally, adding an element of life to the shadows, a pair of glowing yellow eyes opened up on each of their faces.

The Peanuts stared in shock at the seemingly living shadows, they weren't exactly the scariest looking monsters imaginable, but the mere fact that they were walking shadows was enough to frighten anyone.

"Be aware that these are only allusions, but they present an exact replication of what my sister has transformed her followers into" Sparky began as the shadows moved around erratically "These creatures are called heartless. They are formed under circumstances where a

person's heart has been completely engulfed by darkness, and their sentient minds torn away. Once innocent and good people, the heartless are now puppets to my sister, acting only on her command, though in battle their instincts guide them. With luck the majority of you shall never have the displeasure of encountering the real thing, though you Charlie Brown, will likely be faced with thousands of heartless during your time as Guardian of Light"

Charlie Brown gulped at the thought of thousands of these shadow monsters charging against him as Sparky dismissed the allusions.

"Assuming you wish to stay I will put up some chairs for you all" Sparky said to the other Peanuts. He looked upwards and commanded "14 rest chairs required" And immediately fourteen comfortable armchairs appeared near the corner of the room. The kids exchanged looks and went to sit down in the chairs.

"Got any of that popcorn left?" Freida asked Peppermint Patty when they were all properly seated.

"No, I ate it all. Hey Sparky, think this room could poof us up some popcorn?" Peppermint Patty yelled to the spirit, who shrugged.

"It's a training room, not a mess hall" Sparky commented dryly "If you want food I can lead you to the kitchens"

Not wanting to miss a thing nor prolong Charlie Brown's training, Patty and Freida shook their heads. Sparky nodded ok and floated to Charlie Brown's left side.

"Well, you've already had a go at channelling your energy Charlie, so perhaps we should start with something slightly more practical. Before we begin I would like you to channel some more of your inner light. Alright?" Sparky instructed. Charlie Brown nodded and began concentrating on positive thoughts. A light aura appeared around him as his energies were charged.

"Very good. Now, typically in a fight a person would mainly use their fists to attack. And as it so has it most of the techniques you will learn as Guardian shall be performed by first channelling light into your hands. You can channel light energy to any part of your body of course, mainly for the purpose of healing. I will explain more on that as we continue. For now, I would like you to command all of your energy into your right hand. We'll start it simple, I would just like you to break a few very hard objects by punching them" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown did as instructed and redirected the light circling his body so that it was all within his hand. His friends watched eagerly, excited to see how this went.

Sparky looked up at the ceiling and instructed "Begin New Guardian training session, Part 1"

Getting used to everything weird that was happening to him, Charlie Brown was not surprised when several heavy items suddenly popped out of thin air in front of him. He was however, surprised by the choice of training equipment. A boulder, a metal statue of a beagle, a giant block made from what looked like metal but was entirely black, and a wall of diamond.

"Now, I would like you to focus on maintaining that build up of light in your hand, as for your first exercise I want you to shatter each of these objects in turn into a thousand tiny pieces with only one punch" Said Sparky. Charlie Brown stared at him uncertainly.

"Are you sure about this?" Charlie Brown asked.

"As sure as I am that Mario wears overalls" Sparky replied. Charlie Brown stared even more uncertainly "Oh, right, that reference doesn't apply to people in your universe... anyhow, you have nothing to fear Charlie. This is a very simple exercise. I simply want to make sure you can control your light long enough to make an attack. Now, we'll begin with the rock. Keep your hand shrouded in light and form it into a fist. Keep your mind on positive thoughts at all times, and then punch the rock as hard as you can. Don't worry about hurting yourself, if you do this right you will feel no pain as you break the rock"

"And if I do it wrong?" Charlie Brown asked nervously. Sparky's eyes fidgeted.

"Well... try not to think about that. Positive, remember" Sparky said a little too keenly. Charlie Brown gulped, but decided he'd have to shrug off the worry to get this done.

The Peanuts leaned forward in their seats, eager to see Charlie Brown break a rock with his bare-er, semi-bare hand. Noticing that the light in his hand had subsided while he was listening to Sparky, Charlie Brown summoned more light to his hand, this time skipping past the part with the aura around his body. Charlie Brown looked square at the rock. Trying to ignore the possible pain he might feel, Charlie Brown held back his hand and fired a punch...

"... Yow!" Charlie Brown clutched his wrist and shook his hand around, trying to reduce the pain in it. The Peanuts recoiled in their seats at the sight of Charlie Brown's pain, what a disappointing first try.

Sparky sighed and told Charlie Brown "You have to keep out all negative emotions, focus on your happy memories at all times. Only when your mind is at ease and free of doubts can you use your powers effectively. Now, try it again, and ignore the possibility that you might hurt your hand. That's why your light faded before you hit the rock"

Though he was understandably discouraged by his botched first attempt, Charlie Brown agreed to try again straight away. His hand had notably stopped throbbing in pain after only five seconds, Charlie Brown wondered what that meant but decided to ignore it for now.

The new Guardian cleared his head and started to think of happier times. For a third time light rushed into his right hand. Charlie Brown waited for a moment to calm himself and make sure he was feeling good before punching the boulder again.

And what do you know, it worked. Charlie Brown punched the enormous boulder with all his might, and the whole rock cracked from the pressure, shattering into many smaller pieces. Charlie Brown's jaw dropped as he stared at the pile of rubble now lying before him,

astounded he had actually got that right the second time. Over in the corner his friends were cheering.

"Well done Charlie. I told you you could do it" Sparky said proudly, Charlie Brown smiled appreciatively "But of course that's just for starters. Before we can move on to part two of your training, I will need you to break the rest of these objects, beginning with the statue. Feel up to it?"

"I'm ready" Charlie Brown replied instantly. Shattering an enormous rock with one punch seemed to have built up a bit of confidence in Charlie Brown. Sparky smiled at this, that was just the direction Charlie Brown needed to be going in.

Maintaining a positive attitude (A very unusual thing for him) Charlie Brown walked up to the metal beagle statue. Snoopy leaped behind Marcie, shaking in fear at what was about to become of that nice statue. _'Why can't it be a cat?_' The beagle thought, covering his eyes.

With a deep breath, Charlie Brown punched the beagle statue in the chest. The metal ornament fared no better against his strike than the boulder, huge chunks of the statue went flying around the training room. The statue's head happened to land on the arm of Marcie's chair, directly in Snoopy's line of sight. The beagle yelped and shot up onto the ceiling, bumping his head on the marble ceiling and bouncing off Lucy's head as he fell down. The aggravated fussybudget made to punch Snoopy, who ducked under the attack and proceeded to slurp her with his tongue. Lucy screamed out in disgust as Snoopy hopped over the other Peanuts and back to his chair.

Sparky watched the scene with Snoopy unfold with a curious look, but ignored it and turned his full attention back to Charlie Brown, who was now punching the enormous metal cube. But unlike the boulder and statue, the cube didn't completely break apart when he hit it. It did crack, but the damage done was almost substantial compared to Charlie Brown's last two targets.

"Did I do something wrong?" Charlie Brown asked.

"No, you simply need to put more energy into it" Sparky clarified "The more light you channel, the stronger your attack will be. This cube is made out of a rare metal unknown in your world, but it is harder than steel. To break it you not only have to keep your thoughts positive, but you must also command, with your mind, for more of your inner light to flow to your hand. This may take a few tries, but once you've practised a few times it becomes simple"

Charlie Brown wasn't sure how simple it sounded to him, but he wasn't going to argue. Noticing the cracks in the cube had repaired themselves, but deciding to ignore it, Charlie Brown once again channelled light into his hand. The aura around his hand was the same size as before, so Charlie Brown thought for more light to go into it. And Surprisingly, the light around his hand did grow bigger, and he felt stronger than before.

"Ok, I'll try again" Charlie Brown said. He stared intently at the cube and punched it once more. And once more, the cube cracked under the force of his punch, but not to the point it fell apart like the

rock and statue.

Charlie Brown sighed in disappointment, as did most of his friends in the corner.

"Come on Charlie Brown, put some muscle into it!" Freida yelled, trying to sound encouraging but coming off as slightly rude.

"Patience Freida" Sparky said softly, then looked at Charlie Brown "The point of training is to keep trying until you get it right. Don't be discouraged if you make any mistakes or aren't progressing at the rate you would like. Just keep at it Charlie Brown, you will get it right"

Charlie Brown was getting to like hearing Sparky talk to him. No-one had ever had as much confidence in him or shown this much support, and the spirit elder always managed to encourage him. So due in part because he didn't want to let the spirit down, Charlie Brown channelled even more energy into his fist and punched the cube again with all his might. Perhaps it was his determination not to let anybody down, but this time the cube finally shattered under the might of Charlie Brown's attack.

"Alright Charlie Brown! Woo hoo!" Rerun celebrated. Charlie Brown smiled at the younger boy's appreciation for him.

"Very good Charlie Brown. Very good" Sparky praised. Charlie Brown scratched his head impishly, then glanced over at the last remaining structure, the diamond wall.

"So, do I have to break that next?" Charlie Brown asked cautiously. He knew how a lot of people said diamonds were one of the hardest substances on Earth. Whether that was true or not he wasn't sure, but he did have his doubts. Sparky noticed this and smiled encouragingly at the thirteen year old.

"Yes, the Diamond wall is the final phase of stage 1. But to break it, I want you to use both your hands" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown sighed in relief at that one.

"Ok then" Charlie Brown replied.

"Well then this should be an easy one" Commented Patty as the gang watched Charlie Brown approach the diamond wall and surround his fists with light.

"Yeah, if can break all those other things with one punch he can easily break that diamon in two" Franklin added confidently.

"Think Sparky'll let us keep the shards?" Violet asked. Some of the greedier Peanuts fantasised for a moment about what they could buy with a pile of diamonds.

Charlie Brown meanwhile was taking a deep breathe. Eyes locked firmly on the diamond wall in front of him, Charlie Brown held back his arm and fired a punch from his right hand at the wall's centre, followed immediately by a left hook. But to everyones surprise, the diamond was only slightly cracked.

"I should also mention that this is not the same sort of diamond you are accustomed to. This diamond comes from the Glade of Dreams, diamonds there are harder even than those found on your Earth. This phase of the task is about patience and endurance anyway. To shatter this diamond wall you will have to punch it continuously until it breaks, not stopping once or allowing your light to fade" Sparky explained. This gave Charlie Brown an "Ooooh" moment, but came at an annoyance to Linus.

"Then why didn't you explain that to Charlie Brown before he punched it?" Linus asked. Sparky shrugged innocently.

"The author likes surprises" Sparky replied, leaving the kids confused as to what the heck he meant. Realizing they would only become more confused if he tried to explain Sparky did not bother to clarify his statement and instead spoke more to Charlie Brown "It is important that you maintain control over the light long enough to break this diamond. Most battles you will face against my sister's minions will probably go on for a long time, and you will probably be pushed to your limits plenty of times. Learning to maintain control over your powers over long periods of time is vital before we proceed any further with your training. So, ready?"

Charlie Brown had a slightly hard time keeping up with everything that he was being told, but nodded his head and started to try again. Summoning more light into his fists, Charlie Brown made sure to keep his thoughts happy and pleasant as he began wailing on the diamond structure. After a good dozen jabs large cracks were starting to form over the diamond, and it looked like he was going to break it. But, to everyone's disappointment, as Charlie Brown was making his way up to two dozen punches the light around his hands began to subside, and he ended up injuring his right hand again as he punched the wall with a bare hand.

The Peanuts sighed in unison. So close. Charlie Brown shook the pain off, after watching the cracks he had made in the diamond magically disappear he sighed too and looked down in disappointment.

"My boy do not feel discouraged. I have already said the purpose of training is to improve upon yourself and keep going until you get things right" Sparky said quickly "It may take you a few attempts before you are able to fully shatter the diamond, but that's to be expected. If I thought you would shatter it on your first try I wouldn't ask that you attempt it. Just remember that, I know it's hard for you not to feel discouraged, but I'm afraid you're going to have to stay positive for once Charlie Brown. Just keep going"

Feeling less disappointed after that quick pep talk, Charlie Brown agreed to try again.

And again.

And again...

And again, and again and again. Charlie Brown continuously punched the wall of diamond many times and still it would not crack, either the light would subside right as he was about to shatter the gem completely or he just got worn out and had to spend a few seconds catching his breathe. Charlie Brown continued punching at the wall

for what felt like well over an hour, and still he was making only very slow progress. Naturally, despite being impressed at first by Charlie Brown's super strong light punches, the Peanuts were quickly growing bored. They all waited in vain for Charlie Brown to finally shatter the annoying diamond so he could move on to something more interesting for them to watch.

After a long and irrate silence, Violet finally prepared to comment on the situation. Remembering that she was trying to improve her behaviour and treatment of Charlie Brown, and noting that Franklin was sitting only two arm chairs away from her, Violet made sure to choose each word carefully.

"You know, I don't mean to be rude or anything, but this lack of progress is getting on my nerves a little. I wish Charlie Brown would just hurry up so we can move on" Violet said. Everyone nearest to her nodded.

"He is taking his time, and it doesn't look like he's getting any closer to his goal" Patty supplied, watching as Charlie Brown came just a few punches away from shattering the diamond wall completely before his hands lost their light aura again.

"We just have to be patient, that's all" Pigpen said reasonably.

"To heck with that" Lucy snapped, jumping out of her seat and making her way towards Charlie Brown. The Peanuts grimaced as they saw Lucy march up to their friend, worried she'd do something to make everything worse.

Lucy approached Charlie Brown, still catching his breathe from that last failed attempt and looking more put down than ever with this long string of failures. Lucy put on her widest smile and said "Wow, you're getting good at this aren't you?"

Charlie Brown looked over to Lucy and gave her a questionable look.

"Um, I guess... still need to do better though" Charlie Brown replied, unsure of Lucy's intentions. Sparky watched Lucy with a hint of caution, but decided to leave her be for the time being.

"You know Charlie Brown, it is really cool what you can do. Your powers are sooooo awesome" Lucy praised, Charlie Brown smiled weakly and scratched the back of his head.

"Well, they're not all that special" Charlie Brown insisted, but Lucy shook her head.

"Oh but they are Charlie Brown, you're so cool with those powers" Lucy said, a sly grin creeping up her face as she spoke on "I bet everyone back home would admire you so much after seeing you with these powers. Why, I bet even that Little Red Haired Girl would admire you"

Charlie Brown blushed and widened his eyes at this comment. Suddenly looking hopeful he asked "Really?"

"Of course. Girls LOVE superheroes, and you've got some pretty super powers right now. I bet old Heather would fall head over heels in

love if she saw you with these powers" Lucy was saying in matter-of-fact tone. Charlie Brown's face split into a goofy grin as he fantasised.

"Gee... that would be great" Charlie Brown said gleefully. A satisfied smirk on her face, Lucy left Charlie Brown to his own devices for a minute and returned to her comfy seat in the corner.

"What did you do Lucy?" Linus asked his sister sternly.

"Watch and see" Lucy replied confidently. The Peanuts all raised an eyebrow at Lucy before turning back to Charlie Brown. The young Guardian of Light was channelling light energy into his hands again and punching the diamond wall. But to everyones shock, Charlie Brown managed this time to keep up his attack until the cracks in the wall grew so large that the diamond was finally forced to fall apart, signalling Charlie Brown's success over the first phase of his training.

"And who says I don't give good advice" Lucy said smugly to herself.

Sparky observed the shattered pile of diamonds Charlie Brown had just successfully created and hummed. He made a quick glance in Lucy'd direction, wondering if he should comment on what she had said, but decided to shrug it off since it had actually done Charlie Brown some good. He floated downwards over an exhausted Charlie Brown, who was both happy over his success but also seemed to be in disbelief.

"Well, that's a remarkrable improvement Charlie. If you can just continue to hold on to your positive thoughts in that manner you should do fine to utilise your powers in battle" Sparky praised, enjoying the smile it put on Charlie Brown's face "But no time to rest yet, there's still much I have to teach you"

"Ok then. So, what's next?" Charlie Brown asked. He was still a bit apprehensive of everything that was going on and unsure how fit he was to be a Guardian, but he was really excited to see just what sort of amazing things he could do with these powers.

"Well, phase one of your training is all about learning to gain and maintain control of your powers. Phase two is using that power in more... interesting ways" Sparky replied, perking everyones interests "As Guardian of Light, you can obviously manipulate the light to achieve all manner of techniques. For this stage of your training you will only learn the basics, such as generating light beams, spheres and shields. The former two can be used to attack, while the shield is obviously to defend yourself and others around you. As you further your training I will also teach you to create light constructs, but I'll talk more about that when we come to it. Now, before this phase of your training is complete I want you to be able to produce a sturdy shield and fire spheres and beams of light from your hands off by heart, while we shall also work on perfecting your aim for the latter two. Still following me?"

Charlie Brown was a bit lost on some things, such as what was the point of making a sphere out of light, but not one to argue he just nodded his head. Sparky recognised he was still a bit uncertain, but

for Charlie Brown it was probably best to let him figure things out as he went along.

"Alright then" Sparky said, looking once more to the ceiling "Begin New Guardian Training Session Phase 2"

The rubble that had become of the objects Charlie Brown shattered vanished into the vast whiteness of the training room. The Peanuts wondered for a moment what sort of contraptions would spring up for this part of the training. The answer was a little underwhelming.

Three targets like you would use for archery popped up in the far end of the room, and an old tennis ball machine in another corner of the room. Charlie Brown and friends stared questionably at the choice of training gear.

"There's more to come, but for the moment this is all we will need" Sparky clarified.

"Ok. So, what do we do first?" Charlie Brown asked, Sparky shrugged playfully.

"Whatever you want. The choice is between creating a shield made of light, shooting a beam of light or creating a sphere of light. Which one you attempt first is entirely up to you" Sparky replied. Charlie Brown mulled things over in his head.

"Which ones easier?" Charlie Brown asked. Hey, who wouldn't ask that.

"Hard to say, since I'm the only Guardian of Light who's ever existed" Sparky said unsurely "Personally I always found shields to be the easiest to conjure"

"Alright, so what do I need to do to make one?" Charlie Brown questioned.

"Well, first and most obviously you need to channel light into your hands" Sparky began, Charlie Brown did so "Then, you need to put your hands in front of you. Then, while your conscious mind must be focused firmly on happy thought, you must use your subconscious mind to command the light into your hands to expand into a barrier in front of you"

"Is that all?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Basically, yes. It's no more difficult to create a shield than open a portal. But, as you must focus firmly on where a portal of light will take you, also you must focus on how hard you wish to make your shield. To create a light shield that can withstand powerful attacks, you must focus your mind. Think of the happiest things possible with your conscious mind, while at the same time commanding with your subconscious mind for the shield to appear and remain strong in the face of attack. It can be complicated, but that's why we're here, to teach you how to do it right" Sparky commented.

Charlie Brown pursed his lips, pushing the growing sense of doubt to the back of his mind he began channelling light to his hands. It was surprising, but already lighting up his hands and channelling his

inner light had become second nature. Charlie Brown couldn't believe that he was suddenly doing so good at using these new powers, when he usually never succeeded at anything new he tried. But he mustn't think like that, no bad thoughts for this training.

Charlie Brown stretched his glowing hands out in front of him. While he wasn't mostly thinking about happy memories like when Snoopy used to actually act somewhat like a normal dog, another side of Charlie Brown's mind was commanding the light to take shape and form a shield. Sparky was right about it being complicated, trying to think about one thing while he was supposed to be concentrated on positive thoughts was far from easy to do. But, after a mere ten minutes, Charlie Brown got it right.

The light shield Charlie Brown produced was not like a medieval knights shield, or any type of shield that existed. It was more of a circular barrier of translucent light that protruded from Charlie Brown's hands and was large enough to block his entire body from anything coming at him from the direction he was facing. (If that didn't help you understand it, just think of the Invisible Woman's forcefields).

The Peanuts "Ooooh"'ed and "Ahhhh"'ed at the barrier, they didn't get long to admire it though because Charlie Brown was so surprised he lost control a few seconds after and it dispersed. The kids responded with a disappointed "Awww!"

Sparky on the other hand was thrilled by this progression.

"Excellent work Charlie. You know, I've never had to train anyone to use my powers before, but you're doing far better than I could have hoped" Sparky showered Charlie Brown with praise, which the poor old kid could only think of as undeserved "Now that you've forged a shield, we need to test your ability to keep it sustained under pressure" Sparky turned to the Peanuts gang as he said this "Would one of you like to volunteer to help out in this next part?"

The Peanuts were caught off guard by this question, they hadn't expected to take any part in Charlie Brown's training other than watching it first hand. After a brief discussion amongst the group, Linus hopped forward.

"So, what do you need me to do?" Linus asked.

"Oh, it's quite simple. I just need someone solid to operate the tennis ball machine" Sparky explained, gesturing to the machine in the corner. Linus nodded his head, realising that should have been obvious.

"I see. So you want Charlie Brown to block the balls with his shield" Sparky nodded to confirm Linus' statement. Charlie Brown suddenly had a nervous spasm.

"Isn't there another way we can do this?" Charlie Brown asked meekly. With all the baseballs he'd had hit back at him over the years he had developed a slight fear of balls flying at him.

"I'm afraid this method is the least likely to cause you harm" Sparky replied, sensing the boy's worry "Don't worry though, it shouldn't

take long to master shield making"

With his orders set Linus walked over to the tennis ball machine and readied it to fire a ball Charlie Brown's way. Charlie Brown twitched nervously, but managed to shake off the worry with the refreshing memory of his time as "Mr Sack".

"Ready Linus?" Sparky asked the younger boy.

"Ready" Linus replied confidently.

"Ready Charlie Brown?" Sparky asked the Guardian.

"I guess" Charlie Brown replied half heartedly. Sparky gave him a minute to get his positive thought in order before making sort of move.

Charlie Brown took a deep breathe and summoned another light shield. Sparky nodded to Linus, who fiddled with the controls of the tennis ball machine until he figured out how to make it fire a single ball at Charlie Brown's shield. The ball flew at great speed towards the barrier, bouncing off it's glowing surface. Charlie Brown twitched as the ball struck the shield, which concerned him but not Sparky.

"Alright, now try it with three balls at once" Sparky told Linus. The blanket carrier nodded and made the machine launch three balls Charlie Brown's way. The first ball made the barrier giggle, the second caused a few cracks, and the third ball smashed through the middle of the shield and struck Charlie Brown dead on in the face. The Peanuts winced at this sight as Linus clasped a hand to his mouth and frantically started apologising.

"Good grief" Charlie Brown sighed on the floor, feeling like a loser.

"Don't fret Charlie, just get up and try again. This training is trial on error, after all" Sparky encouraged his protege, who just gave an incoherent mumble and got to his feet.

Charlie Brown focused on some more happy thoughts and sprung up another shield. Sparky had Linus fire another three balls at Charlie Brown, this time the shield managed to survive the three hits, though it was still heavily cracked.

"Very good. But before we move any further you should try and polish up your technique. Linus, kindly fire another three balls when Charlie Brown is done setting up a new shield" Said Sparky.

And this was the routine for the next half and hour or so. Charlie Brown would set up another shield made of light after every three balls fired at him, trying to increase his control over the shield so that it was less cracked after each go. A few times Charlie Brown lost concentration and was hit in the face with another tennis ball, but these instances became fewer and far between as the minutes rolled on. When Charlie Brown was able to create a shield that only sustained a few crack after three balls, Sparky had Linus move on to firing five balls at a time. Fifteen more minutes went by, and finally Charlie Brown was able to maintain a light shield without having it take any damage from the tennis ball attacks.

"Well, it seems we can move on a little bit further" Sparky said optimistically.

"About time!" Sally called out, as all the other Peanuts yawned in the corner.

"Er, yes. Anyway, you could do with a little more training in creating more resilient shields, but since we've not a great deal of time we should probably move on to light beams or spheres" Sparky explained, staring expectantly at Charlie Brown. Realising what he wanted to know from him, Charlie Brown replied that he'd like to do light beams next.

"Very well. Linus, thank you for your help, you may retake your seat" Sparky said to Linus, who nodded and rejoined his friends by the armchairs. Sally used her tired state as an excuse to yawn and rest her head on his shoulder. Linus quickly leaned to his right so her head hit the arm of the chair.

Sparky motioned for Charlie Brown to stare at the targets and began explaining the second part of Phase 2 "Now then, to produce a beam of light you need only channel light into your hands, you can do it with only one but it is easier to put both together. Then you need to extend your hands out in front of you and command that light to shoot forth in a concentrated stream"

"Ok... I have a question" Charlie Brown began, Sparky looked receptively at him "Does every technique I need to learn involve me covering my hands in light and thinking for it to do something"

"More or less. Your powers come from your the light within your heart, and are manipulated by your imagination. They are limited only by your own sense of imagination and willpower, sort of like the Green Lantern power rings of the DC world. I don't expect you to get that reference either" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown thought for a moment before shrouding his hands with light.

Realising Sparky wanted him to hit one of the targets with a light beam, which Charlie Brown wasn't even sure he could make yet, the young Guardian stretched out his hands, directing them so his opened palms were facing the bullseye mark from his perspective and began channelling even more light into his hands. With as many happy thoughts rushing through his head as possible, Charlie Brown then commanded the light to shoot forward as a beam.

And Charlie Brown was quite surprised when the light did just that. So surprised that he ended up throwing his hands up so that the beam flew ten foot over the target. Charlie Brown was discouraged by his poor marksmanship, while his friends were fascinated by his display.

"This is why I said the Shield was easier to learn than the light beam or sphere. Though it is easy to shoot a beam of light from your hands it is more difficult to aim it precisely. While your mind is already juggling with happy thoughts and commanding the light to take form, you must also maintain physical awareness and watch where you are shooting the beam, and also how your body reacts. It's a difficult task, but, as I may have said before, you just need to keep

practising" Sparky told Charlie Brown, who nodded wearily.

"Come on Charles, you can do it!" Marcie yelled, trying to encourage her friend. Judging by the smile on his face, it seemed to be working.

Charlie Brown stared determinedly at the target as he outstretched his glowing hands again. Eyes locked firmly on the bullseye and mind focused on pleasant things, Charlie Brown fired another beam of light. It was a marked improvement, only five feet over the target this time.

"Better, but aim a little lower and try not to jump when you launch the beam" Sparky instructed.

And so Charlie Brown shot ten more light beams in an effort to strike just one of the three targets. But, as was so often the case with our fair blockhead, all of his efforts resulted in failure. Though he was no longer shooting the beams several feet above the targets, his lousy aim still resulted in them missing the targets completely, sometimes only by a couple of inches, sometimes further.

And the more they watched, the more Charlie Brown's friends grew bored. The prospect of Charlie Brown training to use his godly powers sounded immediately exciting, but when everything Charlie Brown was being taught took so long for him to get right, and all the Peanuts could do in the meantime was sit and wait, it did start to drive each of their patience just a little.

Lucy in particular had started to growl when Charlie Brown missed the mark for the thirteenth time in a row, and as he was preparing for beam number fourteen she finally snapped "Would you just hurry up and HIT IT!"

Charlie Brown jumped at Lucy's loud voice, just as he was firing the beam... which struck the middle target dead in the centre and blasted it into dust!

Charlie Brown gaped at the pile of ash that used to be the centre target, as even his friends looked on in shock. Sparky also was staring wide-eyed at the destroyed target, then hummed as his eyes wondered to the eldest Van Pelt.

"Lucy, I'd like to ask you to please yell at Charlie Brown again as he is preparing to fire a light beam at the left target" Sparky said craftily. Lucy smiled as she realised what he was getting at and nodded her head vigorously.

Charlie Brown, also aware of what was on Sparky's mind, positioned his outstretched hand in line with the target to the left of the one he'd just destroyed and channeled light into his hands-

"DON'T MISS" Lucy shrieked, Charlie Brown jumped again and the beam he fired hit the target dead centre. Sparky smiled victoriously.

"Again, both of you" Sparky instructed. Charlie Brown aimed for the final remaining target on the far right, as Lucy prepared her next exclamation.

"You better hit it!" Lucy yelled. And SMASH, the third target was incinerated.

The Peanuts clapped and cheered as Charlie Brown waved his hand in thanks to Lucy and she examined her fingers, a smug smirk on her face the whole time.

"An unconventional way to learn proper accuracy, but an effective one it seems" Sparky said proudly. Charlie Brown looked at him with a smile as he awaited further instruction "But, as Lucy will not be there to yell at you during a proper fight, you will need to learn how to fire a beam without having her say anything. But, as the shock of her yells seems to help your aim, I want you to launch a beam at two more targets with her yelling you on. Then, for the final target I want you to simply imagine she's yelling at you before you fire. With any luck, you should hit the remaining target all on your own. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, but it sounds illogical" Charlie Brown answered honestly.

"It does indeed" Sparky chuckled "But we'll try it anyway. That is if Lucy's willing to comply"

"I'm good" Lucy agreed immediately.

"But wait, there aren't any more targets" Schroeder pointed out. Then three more targets suddenly appeared by the blank white wall "Oh... never mind"

And so, following Sparky's very unusual new training regime, Charlie Brown fired two more beams at the targets. Aided by Lucy's excecively loud yelling, both beams hit their marks. This Charlie Brown wasn't worried about, it was getting the final target that would prove the real challenge.

Charlie Brown took a deep breathe and collected his thoughts. The Peanuts leaned forward, now gripping their seats as they waited to see whether Charlie Brown could get the last target by himself. Luckily, having put up with Lucy and her crabbiness for most of his life, it wasn't hard for Charlie Brown to imagine her screaming at him in his mind. So when he fired the next light beam, it did in fact hit the target.

Charlie Brown's friends clapped their hands in celebration for his success, joined quickly by Sparky as the spirit dog floated down in front of Charlie Brown.

"See, that wasn't too hard, right"

"I must admit... this isn't going so bad" Charlie Brown replied. He couldn't believe it, but this training was actually easier than he thought it would be. Though Charlie Brown had worried immensely before he got to this room, he was actually doing a pretty good job at mastering his powers. And for someone with as little confidence as Charlie Brown, this was all very uplifting.

But despite this success Charlie Brown did not move on to the next exercise straight away. First Sparky had him fire a beam at another six targets. With the mental clip of Lucy barking orders at him popping up in Charlie Brown's mind each time, he managed to hit them

all. Maybe not always in the centre, but he still blasted the targets hard enough to reduce them to dust anyway.

"Alright, now that that's out of the way, time to begin the final task in Phase 3 of your training: Light spheres" Sparky explained dramatically "I suppose you're wondering what I mean when I say "Light sphere" don't you?" Charlie Brown nodded at this "Well it's exactly what the name implied, you channel light into your palm, then subconsciously command the light to hover above your palm and shape into a sphere, preferably half a foot in diameter. Would you like to give it a try?"

Not exactly like he had another choice, Charlie Brown agreed and held up his right hand. After channelling some light into it, Charlie Brown squinted his eyes as he tried to picture the light forming into a ball over his palm. Slowly but surely, the light around his hand began to gather up and hovered just above Charlie Brown's palm, and under his mental influence it began to form a sphere. But much smaller than Sparky had instructed.

"Try adding a little more light to it Charlie" Sparky instructed kindly.

Charlie Brown channelled more light into the sphere, which grew only slightly bigger.

"A little more" The spirit insisted.

Charlie Brown focused more energy into the sphere, which again did not grow too much larger.

"A little more still"

Charlie Brown overdid it this time and channelled way too much light into the sphere, which grew to massive size and went out of control before exploding in Charlie Brown's face, covering him in soot and burns.

"... Too much..."

Over in the corner Snoopy's stomach started to rumble. Not one to let himself go without food, Snoopy raised his hand and called to Sparky _"May I be excused to go grab a bite to eat?"_

Sparky looked over to Snoopy and, after giving it some thought, agreed.

"Alright Snoopy. Linus, you take Snoopy back to the rest area you were brought to upon first entering the Light Palace, I don't trust him going back on his own and you're the most responsible" Sparky instructed. Linus gave the spirit a salute and prepared to leave with Snoopy.

"Don't worry Sparky, I'll make sure Snoopy doesn't get up to his usual schenanigans" Linus promised as he and Snoopy left the training room. Woodstock of course decided to tag along with his beagle buddy. Sparky watched apprehensively as the trio left.

"I wonder if I shouldn't have let them go without me... oh well, too late now" Sparky thought to himself as he turned back to Charlie

Brown struggling to form a right sized sphere.

With Linus walking behind them to make sure they didn't wander off (And they did try a couple of times) Snoopy and Woodstock headed back to the foyer to grab a bite to eat. They noticed that it seemed to take them at least five minutes to get there, longer than any of them thought it was. But then again, they were too busy looking around excitedly at all the doors before to really pay attention to how long they were taking.

Upon reaching the sitting room Snoopy darted straight for the platinum refrigerator, quickly gobbling up a cooked ham as Woodstock ate a slice of bread. After the beagle offered him a bite Linus helped himself to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Finishing their respective snack quickly, the trio shut the refrigerator and headed back through the door besides Exodia's statue and down the hallway back to the training room (Again, Linus had to keep Snoopy from running off through many of the other doors).

As soon as Linus, Snoopy and Woodstock walked through the door however they were met with a surprise, as Charlie Brown stood nearby with a perfectly formed sphere of light in his hand, which he proceeded to hurl at a newly appeared target. The other Peanuts began cheering as the trio just blinked in surprise.

"Aww, don't tell me we missed the whole thing" Linus moaned disappointedly. Everyone suddenly stared at him and the two animals in surprise.

"Well finally you're back, where've you been?" Lucy asked irritably as though they had been gone for a long time. Linus stared questionably at his sister.

"We just went back to the sitting room, we were only gone twelve minutes" Linus explained simply, but it seemed this only confused the others.

"Twelve minutes? Try half an hour" Freida replied. Now they were all confused.

"Ah, yes, that's yet another thing I forgot to mention" Sparky began as the Peanuts began staring expectantly at him "You see, this training room is designed so that time slows down when you're inside it. It's based roughly off of the hyperbolic time chamber of the dragon ball world, though not quite as effective. You see, we have actually been in here now for over two hours, but in comparison only forty six minutes have passed everywhere outside it, that includes on your world and all the others. It will allow Charlie Brown as much time as he need for training before you all need to go to bed"

The Peanuts jaws had all fallen. A room where time ran slower than it did outside. How cool was that!

After letting the Peanuts marvel over this fact, Sparky congratulated Charlie Brown for apparently perfecting the light sphere technique and announced "Clear room"

And the ash piles that were once targets and the automatic tennis ball machine vanished, to be replaced by nothing. Absolutely nothing.

"Um... so what's next?" Charlie Brown asked in confusion.

"For Phase 3 of your training you will not require any equipment. In fact, it's better to have the room empty for this part of the training" Sparky explained, much to Charlie Brown and friends' curiosity "Now, as you might have noticed from your lack of bruises from the tennis balls shot into your face, your powers serve more purpose than to bring harm to your enemies. After all, you are a Guardian, not a mercenary. You also have the ability to heal yourself and others"

"Really?" Charlie Brown asked, highly interested.

"Indeed. Unlike the abilities you have learned thus far, your healing ability is constantly at work. If you cut yourself, the cut will patch itself up withing seconds. If you break a bone, it will repair itself within minutes. And if you are infected with cancer or a fatal disease, your inner light will boost your antibodies to fight it off. But don't think this makes you immune to injury, your healing abilities have their limits. Your body will only recover from a certain amount of pain and damage before your healing energies are exhausted, and will need to be recharged before you can regain your healing abilities" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown nodded as he spoke, amazed and, admittedly, quite pleased by this bit of news. He was always hurting himself some way or another. Being able to heal himself sounded like it could really come in handy.

"So then Charlie Brown doesn't need to practise this part, if it's always working?" Freida questioned.

"Yes... and no" Sparky said cryptically, then addressed Charlie Brown directly as he continued "While your body may be constantly healing itself, you can speed up the process by channelling light to that part of the body. If it sounds simple, then it is, but only just. Healing energy comes from the purest light in your heart, so to use it you would have to focus your mind on your absolute happiest thoughts. Think you can do that?"

"I think... maybe" Charlie Brown replied in his usual self-doubting tone. Spary sighed mentally at this, but knew Charlie Brown would feel more confident after succeeding.

"Alright then. Lucy, could you come over here for a minute, We'll need your help for this part" Sparky called to the girl in the blue dress, who blinked in surprise at being asked to help out but hopped forward eagerly anyway "Now, before Charlie Brown can heal himself, he first requires an injury to heal. In this case, we'll go for a black eye. So Lucy, I'd like you to slug Charlie Brown in the face as hard as you can"

"Excuse me!" Charlie Brown yelled, not at all liking that plan.

"I understand your reluctance, but this training is all for your own good Charlie. And it won't hurt for more than a second anyway" Sparky said reassuringly. Charlie Brown was anything but reassured.

"So wait, you're actually giving me permission to punch Charlie Brown in the face?" Lucy asked the spirit oddly. Sparky nodded.

"Try not to enjoy it too much though" Sparky joked. Lucy frowned and put her hands on her hips.

"Hey, I may be crabby, but I'm not sadistic" Lucy said firmly... well... maybe a little bit, she admitted to herself. But she wouldn't enjoy this.

"Ok then. I know it might seem silly of me to ask you this considering what's about to happen, but just try to relax and think positive Charlie Brown" Sparky instructed "It's the only way you'll get things done after all"

Charlie Brown gulped and closed his eyes, desperately trying to keep his thoughts happy as Lucy held back her fist.

"Alright Lucy, on the count of three I want you to punch Charlie Brown in the eye. Charlie Brown... try not to think about that and focused on your most happy of thoughts. Ok then. Three... two... one!"

POW

Lucy slugged Charlie Brown with immense force, sending the poor boy flying backwards and landing on his read. Charlie Brown, now adjourned with an ugly black eye, winced a little and tried desperately not to think of how painful that punch was and channelled light around his face, specifically focusing it around his eye area. At first it didn't seem to have any effect, though after a few seconds the bruise around the eye started to fade. And then thirty seconds later, the black eye was completely healed up. Unfortunately, Sparky seemed displeased with this outcome.

"No, that didn't work" Sparky said plainly, Charlie Brown groaned as he explained further "If you had succeeded in channelling healing energy to your eye it would have healed near instantly. I'm very sorry to have to tell you this Charlie, but I'm afraid we'll have to try again"

Charlie Brown got to his feet, groaning at the prospect of receiving more slugs from Lucy. Something told him this was going to take more than a few tries.

And that something was dead right.

Over the course of twenty minutes Lucy continuously punched Charlie Brown in the face, and each time she did the Guardian would channel light around his black eye in an effort to heal it quicker. But it never seemed to have the effect Sparky desired, and Charlie Brown was forced to endure even more punches from his heavy fisted friend. Of course there was never any lasting soreness on Charlie Brown's face, but the impact of Lucy's punches still hurt like heck.

Then finally, as the situation was beginning to look hopeless, an improvement was made. Lucy punched Charlie Brown in the face, he tried to think positively despite the sharp pain, light shrouded Charlie Brown's face, and his injury then healed in only fifteen seconds, half the time it was normally taking. Sparky smiled as he noticed this, if only small, acheivement.

"Finally we're progressing" Sparky said excitedly, and Charlie Brown

sighed in relief... "But it still needs improvement" Charlie Brown facepalmed.

And thus, Charlie Brown was forced to endure another round of Lucy's punching. At this point though he seemed to be improving his healing time on every attempt... by one second. After another ten punches and Charlie Brown reducing the time it took to heal his black eye to only five seconds, Sparky finally appeared satisfied.

"I think that should do for healing. For now anyway. I don't suppose you wish to continue much further with this exercise, do you?" Sparky asked lightheartedly. Charlie Brown responded with a surprisingly loud and uncharacteristic "NO!" as Lucy took her place back with the other Peanuts.

Charlie Brown waited for Sparky to explain the next technique he would have to learn, thinking that anything would probably be better than what he had just endured. However, he was completely unprepared for what Sparky had to say.

"Ok, now it is time I explain the final technique I wish to teach you tonight. That is not to say this will conclude our training for today, but rather after this we will only be working on polishing off the skills you have already learned and working on applying them in battle. But that's phase 4. Right now, I am going to teach you how to fly"

Charlie Brown gaped at the dog spirit, as did most of the Peanuts. Fly? Charlie Brown had almost forgotten that was one of the abilities Sparky mentioned he now possessed while talking to Rerun earlier. Suddenly the young teen felt ill.

"You want me to fly?" Charlie Brown asked nervously. His friends began whispering excitedly, thinking that this would truly be interesting to watch.

"But of course. The ability to fly through the air is a very handy skill to have, and quite fun too" Sparky said encouragingly. But Charlie Brown couldn't believe that. For while most people probably would find the prospect of flying to be pretty exciting, Charlie Brown could only think of how uncomfortable it would be to float unsupported in the air, and of all the things that could go wrong with such an experience.

"Um, are you sure there's nothing else I need to learn first?" Charlie Brown asked quickly. Sparky sighed.

"No, I have already said this is the last technique I need to teach you. But don't worry about it" Sparky said as gently as he could "Flying is not as difficult as it sounds, and the feeling of unpleasantness should only last for a moment. I assure you Charlie Brown, nothing will go wrong"

Charlie Brown thought that was easy for Sparky to say, he was intangible, he couldn't crash or feel pain. And he had probably been flying around places for millions of years, depending on how old the universe was, after all that time it was bound to be second nature to him. Charlie Brown didn't have that luxury.

Despite the growing sense of dread building up inside him Charlie

Brown still listened closely as Sparky explained how he would be flying "Now, to a Guardian, flight is merely levitating ones-self through applying light to the feet. I want you to channel a good amount of light energy into your feet Charlie, then I want you to command that light to steadily lift you a foot off the ground. We'll start your flight training pretty low to the ground, so as to avoid any unfortunate accidents, but I am going to need you to use full concentration to make this work. Understand"

Charlie Brown nodded meekly. Sparky sighed, he was wondering why Charlie Brown was still feeling unconfident after completeting all the prior training exercises so successfully. But then again he reminded himself, this was Charlie Brown. Building self confidence in him might be an ongoing battle.

Already feeling a bit queesy despite being planted firmly on the ground, Charlie Brown began channeling light around his feet. Trying to hold back the mental groan of worry, Charlie Brown gently commanded the light on his feet to lift him up a few inches.

The effect was near instantaneous. One second Charlie Brown thought for the light to lift him up, he hovered five inches off the ground. The Peanuts gasped in awe as Charlie Brown floated off the ground, very unsteadily and looking like he was going to fall over.

"Steady, Charlie Brown. Keep it steady" Sparky cautiously instructed. Despite feeling a sense of panic Charlie Brown managed to fet a slight grip on himself and leaned forward, putting himself in an upright position as he continued hovering unsupported off the ground.

"There, now that wasn't so bad was it?" Sparky asked cheerfully. Charlie Brown's response was to hold his stomach and turn slightly green. Sparky rolled his eyes, but chose to ignore it "Still a tad short of a foot though. Remain calm and float a little higher"

It was only the fear of falling backwards and banging his head against the floor that encouraged Charlie Brown to focus his thoughts to remain mainly positive as he hovered a complete foot off the ground. Sparky floated a few feet away from where Charlie Brown was flying and motioned for him to follow.

"Alright, now all you have to do to move is imagine yourself to fly in my direction. It helps if you lean forward a bit. Alright?" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown took a deep breathe then leaned forward. Still fightin back the feeling of dread, Charlie Brown then commanded the light in his feet to move him forward. And would you believe it, it worked perfectly. Charlie Brown hovered over right in front of Sparky easily. He didn't go too fast and end up crashing into the wall. He didn't lose control and fall on his face. Nothing bad happened, he just flew forward like he was being asked, and it was quite easy.

"Good job. Now I want you to fly to the other side of the room and back" Sparky instructed. Again, Charlie Brown did what was being asked of him, and he did it without any difficulties, it all just seemed to come naturally to him, more so than any of the other techniques he had been taught. This thought brought a smile to Charlie Brown's face, which in turn caused Sparky to smile for him.

And what came as an even bigger surprise to everyone in the room was when Charlie Brown actually managed to accomplish the entire flying lesson without making any of the usual screw ups. After Sparky had made him fly around the room a few more times to get used to the feeling of moving about off the ground the spirit encouraged Charlie Brown to fly higher, reaching up to five feet off the ground. Though Charlie Brown initially was subject to a few shaky nerves over being this high, soon after he was no longer bothered to care as he gracefully flew through the air, either at breakneck speeds or a short flutter.

Charlie Brown wasn't sure what it was, whether it be the freedom of being completely off the ground or the simple fact that he was doing it so easily, but he actually really enjoyed flying. And it showed as Charlie Brown effortlessly twirled around in the air. Needless to say, his friends were spellbound by his performance. By the time Sparky had finally called him back down to the ground, Charlie Brown could hardly believe he had been so worried about flying.

"Wow, perhaps flight should be Phase 1 of the training, considering how easily you handled it" Sparky said, surprised but immensely pleased with his successor's performance. Charlie Brown could only grin with pride, he'd never gotten so good at anything so fast before, so I think you can imagine he was feeling really proud of himself.

"But don't get ahead of yourself now. As hypocritical as it might sound considering what I've just been teaching you Charlie, it is not wise to become too immersed in one's own joy. Overconfidence can be equally as dangerous as underconfidence, in that it can lead to mistakes and carelessness. Of course you should be proud of yourself, you've done an excellent job mastering the techniques I've shown you, but for Phase 4 of your training you'll need plenty of focus" Sparky explained seriously. Though he couldn't help but feel slightly put down by what was being said, Charlie Brown nodded in agreement to the spirit.

"So... what is Phase 4?" Charlie Brown asked the important question. Sparky looked utterly serious as he began to answer.

"Phase 4 is putting all that you have learned to use. And by that I mean, learning to use your powers in a fight" Sparky began, Charlie Brown and his nearby friends listened very closely "Utilising your powers does require you to focus on feeling positive emotions. When confronted by an opponent in a fight there will always be some level of concern and worry felt, particularly if it's a powerful opponent you are facing. So before you may go out into the battle field and engage in a real battle with an evil force, you must learn both how to keep your thoughts positive under the threat of attack, and also learn how to actually fight, since I believe you haven't had much experience brawling"

"I'll say, Chuck's the most pacifistic person I know after Marcie" Peppermint Patty called from the corner.

"Yes Patty, that does add to my point. Now, Charlie, I don't suppose I need to explain to you how I'm going to teach you how to fight?" Sparky said simply. Charlie Brown looked to him in wonder for a moment, and then it occurred to him.

"You want me to fight those heartless simulations" Charlie Brown said. Sparky nodded to confirm it.

Charlie Brown could only gulp at the thought of being faced with those monster shadows, even if they weren't the real deal they had still looked scary when Sparky made them appear earlier.

"Be aware that the heartless simulations created in this room will not do you actual harm. You will feel as though you are being injured as they attack you, but that is merely an effect the room will apply to your psyche, to make the danger appear real. I want you to fight a few swarms of heartless, using each of the techniques I've taught you in this past hour to defeat them. Of course the primary objective is to develop your fighting skills, what better way to do so than through first hand experience?" Sparky asked rhetorically. Charlie Brown could think of a dozen ways he'd like to learn fighting skills better than to fight against a swarm of living shadows. But he didn't dare say that aloud.

The Peanuts gang watched on in anticipation as Sparky gave Charlie Brown a moment to rest and assemble his happiest thoughts and memories, whatever it took to keep himself calm in the face of danger. The kids couldn't help but be a thousand times more eager than Charlie Brown, this entire training session most of them had just sat here doing nothing, having to watch as Charlie Brown repetitively attempted to perfect his newly aquired powers. It was interesting, but the amount of time it normally took Charlie Brown to get a grip on each individual technique did get them all bored and restless. An actual fight sounded much more thrilling and intense, and it would undoubtedly be worth watching.

After a few minutes Sparky asked Charlie Brown if he was reasy to battle. Charlie Brown nodded his head weakly and Sparky turned his head upwards.

"Begin New Guardian Training Session Phase 4, Heartless combat"

Across the vast white room dark blotches began to form across the floor and walls. The shadows started to wriggle and expand, soon rising up out of the ground. And just like that, a total of twenty heartless illusions surrounded Charlie Brown.

The Peanuts shuddered at the sight of the shadow monsters. Maybe they weren't real, nor did they appear exceptionally scary, but the heartless were still terrifying. Charlie Brown felt the bile rise up in his stomach, though he tried to remain calm he couldn't help shake the feeling that he was in for a rough time.

"All of you remain in your seats, these heartless may be simulations, but they will still attack you if you get anywhere near them. Don't move" Sparky sternly instructed the Peanuts gang. None of them argued. The spirit floated far back to the corner of the room, but not before giving Charlie Brown this last bit of encouragement "Just believe in yourself Charlie. You've done well to gain control over your powers, all you have to do now is have faith in yourself, and I promise you'll succeed. If you need to stop we'll end the simulation, but remember, you CAN win this if you try. Good luck"

With Sparky no longer floating over Charlie Brown like a halo the heartless began to inch forward to their target. Charlie Brown kept his guard up. The shadows kept making these strange erratic movements, as though they were going to charge at him but then pulled themselves back, which really made the young Guardian anxious. Deciding he couldn't risk waiting too long to make a move, Charlie Brown focused on happy thoughts and lit his hands up with light.

This action appeared to terrify the heartless, and finally one of them leapt forward. In a moment of panic Charlie Brown lashed out at the false heartless, punching it in the face with enough force to send it flying ten feet backwards, landing on it's feet. As that heartless recovered from the attack, two more sunk back into the ground and made their way towards Charlie.

The shadows on the ground circled around Charlie Brown. The near-bald teen tried kicking at the ground with light covered feet, but it didn't appear to affect the heartless while they were sunk into the ground. After half a minute of this swarming went on, one of the shadows rose up behind Charlie Brown and held back it's clawed hand.

"LOOK OUT" Sally screamed. Charlie Brown jumped at her voice and turned around just in time to see the shadow prepare to stab him with it's claws. Charlie Brown managed to grab the heartless' hand and keep hold of it. The shadow struggled to pull it's arm free as Charlie Brown raised another fist. But before he could deal a hopefully decisive blow, the second heartless rose up and tackled him, knocking him over. The heartless duo prepared to lash out at him again, but Charlie Brown managed to shoot a light beam at the last second. The heartless turned to dust just seconds after the beam had struck them.

Panting heavily (Though more from fear than exhaustion) Charlie Brown shot up to his feet and observed the mob of heartless surrounding him. The destruction of those last two heartless had seemingly sent the shadows into a state of fear, and they were obviously keeping their distance for the moment. Charlie Brown only just managed to keep his hands lit with all the worry he was feeling.

The heartless were much quicker in their next attack. A trio of heartless sunk into the ground and floated around near where Charlie Brown stood. The young Guardian watched every move these shadows made, ready to strike them back if one of them rose up. Unfortunately, while his attention was focused on the three shadows on the floor, Charlie Brown failed to notice the shadow five feet in front of him pull back it's arm and dash forward, striking Charlie Brown in the chest and cutting three large gashes across his chest.

Charlie Brown landed on his back, reeling from the attack. The heartless on the floor began rising up, ready to gang up on him. They would have sliced him to pieces in seconds too, if Charlie Brown had not erected a light shield to ward them off. The shadows momentarily scratched and clawed at the shield, but quickly retreated backwards, too afraid of the light to make further contact with it. But that didn't stop a few more of the little monsters from stalking up behind Charlie Brown (The shield only protected him from one side).

"Uh, Chuck!" Peppermint Patty called, gesturing behind Charlie Brown as he looked at her. Still keeping up his shield, Charlie Brown turned around to see yet another heartless running up behind him. With a quick glance to the heartless once more slashing at his shield, Charlie Brown realised he had no choice but to quickly drop the shield and fly up out of the way. The heartless charging from behind crashed into the apparent leader of the pack ward off by the shield. The heartless that had been tackled growled and bonked the other shadow on the head. Said heartless responded by punching the other in the face. In what looked like a childish fit of anger, the two heartless began brawling amongst themselves, both trying to scratch the other out of existence.

Up near the ceiling of the training room Charlie Brown watched the heartless fight with a look of bemusement. Realising this was a chance he could not afford to miss, Charlie Brown formed a light sphere in his left palm and tossed it downwards, incinerating the fighting heartless.

The Peanuts cheered for Charlie Brown, who himself was feeling pretty good about what just happened. The Guardian looked downwards at the heartless desperately clawing at the wall, trying to no avail to scale it and reach the seemingly bald hero. The knowledge that the heartless couldn't climb soothed Charlie Brown's nerves, and he thought he could just blast the heartless from up here and win this easily without putting himself close to any more danger.

But of course that plan wasn't meant to work.

Some of the heartless clawing at the wall suddenly stopped trying to climb it, seemingly realising that it was pointless trying to scale the wall. So instead, a trio of the shadows sank back into the ground, the round patches of darkness easily moving up the walls and onto the white ceilings.

Charlie Brown's eyes widened as the shadows reached the spot directly above him. The new Guardian tried to lower himself down out of their way, but the centre heartless leapt out of the ceiling and grabbed hold of him, sending Charlie Brown crashing into the ground.

Charlie Brown struggled on the ground as the heartless had him pinned down. He just barely managed to throw the creature off of him and destroy it with a hard light punch, only to then be dogpiled on by five more heartless. The shadows slashed at Charlie Brown, and while no cuts or gashes opened up Charlie Brown still felt the horrible sensation that his body was being torn apart. Unable to push off so many ravenous shadows, Charlie Brown closed his eyes and thought he was done for.

Don't give up!

Charlie Brown's eyes opened. It wasn't Sparky, it wasn't any of his friends. It was a voice inside his own head that was telling him not to surrender, and that same voice was telling him to keep on fighting 'til the end. He still couldn't push the heartless away, nor was he able to squeeze passed them. But another, much better idea suddenly occurred to him.

As Sparky watched the heartless mercilessly slash at his apprentice the former Guardian thought now would be a good time to call off the

exercise. But suddenly, the heartless shot back away from Charlie Brown, terrified. The reason for this became quickly apparent to Sparky and all who were watching. Charlie Brown had surrounded his body in a blazing aura of light. And, as the heartless feared the light, they had jumped back straight away. Charlie Brown knew this wasn't enough to hord all the monsters off, but it did shock them enough to get them off him, and gave him just enough time to disintegrate three more heartless with a light beam before barrel rolling to a safer distance.

The eyes of the Peanuts gang widened, realising their friend was out of danger they breathed a collective sigh of relief as Sparky looked on proudly.

For a moment the heartless just swayed on the spot, slow to register everything that had just went down. Finally regaining some sense of composure the shadows turned to Charlie Brown and prepared their next attack. The Guardian lit his hands up with even more light, not about to give up yet. Three more heartless sank into the ground as another two charged head first at Charlie Brown, who flew over them and blasted them in the back with a light beam. Charlie Brown smirked, but any sense of accomplishment was short lived as one of the sunken heartless emerged from the ground beneath him and headbutted him. Charlie Brown rolled through the air and landed with a thud several feet away, the other two heartless emerged at either side of him.

Charlie Brown made to get up, only to have the heartless grab both his arms. With amazing strength, Charlie Brown lifted the two pests off the ground and shook them around, but they refused to let go. The heartless that had previously headbutted Charlie Brown snuck up from behind and scratched at his back while he was distracted. Charlie Brown screamed in agony as the other two heartless released his arms and slashed at his shoulders. Feeling like his arms had nearly been severed despite the lack of visual injury, Charlie Brown flew upwards to get out the the shadows way. Unfortunately for him, two of the relentless shadows grabbed on to his legs, holding him in place long enough for the third to make a running jump for the hero.

Tackled to the ground, Charlie Brown tried to get up quick, but the annoying shadows were still pinning him down by the legs. Charlie Brown managed to shake them off by channelling light around his legs and then kicked the duo into dust. Rolling onto his back, Charlie Brown saw the third heartless running at him again. Panicing, Charlie Brown summoned a light shield at just the right moment. The shadow crashed face first into the shining barrier, slowly sliding down onto the floor. Before the heartless could snap back to focus Charlie Brown had vaporised it with a light beam.

Before he could be subjected to any more surprise assaults Charlie Brown floated up in the air, out of reach from the remaining heartless. After taking a moment to regain his composure and allow his healing powers to work their magic, Charlie Brown looked down at the remaining shadows. From the twenty heartless that had terrorised Charlie Brown at the start of this fight, only seven remained. This fact filled Charlie Brown with a euthoric joy, he was more than half way through and he still fet like he could go another dozen rounds with these monsters. If he kept fighting like he had been, then he might actually win. Him. Charlie Brown. He had never felt so sure of himself before.

While the Peanuts watched Charlie Brown anxiously, the heartless watched him cautiously. One of the shadows began to sink into the ground to scale up the wall, though this only served as a prompt for Charlie Brown to swoop down and leap into action. One duo of heartless charged straight at him, Charlie Brown dodged to the side and grabbed one of them by the antenna. Channelling light over his arm to increase his strength, Charlie Brown swung the shadow around and smacked it against the floor a couple of times before throwing it into the second heartless as it was about to attack.

The first heartless dissolved into dark mist, while the heartless it had been thrown into merely recoiled on the floor. Charlie Brown prepared to vaporize it with a light beam, but turned this attack instead on a heartless lashing out from behind him. The shadow that had scaled the wall leaped down from the ceiling and tackled Charlie Brown to the ground, the round headed boy managed to roll over on top of it and sent the shadow to it's tomb with a few good light punches to the face. Charlie Brown got to his feet, noticing the heartless he had last been fighting getting up he created a light sphere and threw it at the shadow. with Lucy's screaming voice popping up in his mind he managed to hit the shadow dead centre. For a moment Charlie Brown found himself wondering why he had never thought to use this method for pitching baseballs.

Back in the corner of the room the Peanuts were all cheering, calling for Charlie Brown to finish off the remaining heartless, they were all so surprised, some even shocked beyond words but all pleased nonetheless that Charlie Brown was so close to absolute victory. But none could match the joy Charlie Brown himself was feeling. He only had three more heartless to defeat before he succeeded at this training exercise, he was doing so well that the remaining heartless no longer looked like imposing figures to him, but rather cowering shadows waiting to be shined out. Floating over the scene however, Sparky looked down solumnly at his successor and the three shadows.

'Victory may be close Charlie, but don't celebrate until you know you have succeeded. The tide of battle can always turn'

The three remaining heartless stared blankly at Charlie Brown, who was just floating in place and waiting for them, an uncharacteristic sure smile on his face. The heartless suddenly began inching backwards, slowly moving closer to one another. When their shoulders all touched the shadows suddenly began sinking into the ground, their three shadowy patches merging together into one enormous shadow on the ground. Charlie Brown stared at the shadowed patch in confusion, as did his friends, and Sparky looked intruiged.

Charlie Brown stared intently at the shadow on the ground, waiting with light covered fists for whatever trick the shadows were planning to pull on him. For what felt like an eternity nothing happened, the shadow just remained motionless on the white floors of the training room. Then, finally, a hand rose up and sunk into the ground before the shadow. But this was not the stubby little hand of the small shadow creatures Charlie Brown had just spent the last ten minutes fighting, and it was attatched to a much longer arm.

Charlie Brown's eyes widened in shock as a figure slowly rose up from the shadow on the ground. This was most certainly not the same kind

of creature Charlie Brown had been fighting, it was much more frightening. It bore a clear resemblance to the smaller shadows, but it was over twice as tall, had long arms and legs, much longer lightning bolt shaped antennas, blue veins running along it's body and large muscles to boot. And it's eyes, though they looked the same as on the smaller heartless, when Charlie Brown looked into them he saw they held infinitely more evil and savagery.

The Peanuts all gasped, recoiling in their seats at the sight of the new monster. Charlie Brown was even more terrified, the light had faded from his hands and all he could manage to do was fearfully look up at the heinous figure of the heartless. And Sparky... only looked amused.

"Hmm, interesting. I've never seen simulated shadows combine into a Neo shadow before" Sparky whispered to himself. Noticing the neo shadow crouching down into a fighting position and Charlie Brown still looking horrified, Sparky called out to the boy "Do not be afraid Charlie! This is where we truly decide if you are ready to wield your powers in combat. Though this Neo Shadow may seem formidable, and it is, you must never give up hope. Though this creature may pose more of a threat than the others, you can still defeat it so long as you give it your all! Prepare yourself Charlie, this is where the real battle begins!"

The Neo shadow growled at Charlie Brown, stretching out it's long, razor sharp claws, obviously desiring to hack Charlie Brown to bits. Charlie Brown's friends watched on in fear for what was to become of him, the young Guardian looked straight into the cold yellow eyes of the heartless and sighed. Trying desperately hard to ignore the bile rising up in his stomach, Charlie Brown managed to focus in part on some happy memories and lit his hands up with light once more.

For a moment the two combatants just stood there. The Neo shadow was first to make a move, with breakneck speed the massive shadow lunged to the side of Charlie Brown. Before the near-bald teen could even register what was happening the Neo Shadow dealt him a massive uppercut to the chin, then gave a powerful kick to his stomach, sending Charlie Brown crashing into the left wall.

There were gulps all around as Charlie Brown pushed himself back onto his feet. While he was still shaking off the impact the Neo shadow rushed forward. Charlie Brown saw the beast coming and fired a light beam straight at it. The Neo shadow merely dodged to the right and dashed further forward. Worried, Charlie Brown instead aimed a light punch for the oncoming heartless. The Neo shadow blocked the punch with it's palm and socked Charlie Brown in the face, then slashed him across the chest with it's claws. Charlie Brown gasped in pain. He wanted to clutch his aching stomach, but instead made to punch the Neo shadow in the gut. The muscular heartless grabbed his wrist however, and flung him around and smashed his head into the ground. Before Charlie Brown could even gasp in agony the shadow followed up with a kick that sent the boy rolling into the middle of the room.

The Peanuts gaped in horror at what they were seeing, and even Sparky worried that this might be too great a challenge for Charlie Brown to overcome at this point. On the floor Charlie Brown struggled to move. The pain may have only been a hallucination the room was making him experience, but it was still agonising to endure. With all his might

Charlie Brown struggled into a kneeled down position and surrounded his body with healing light, knowing the shadow wouldn't come too near him while he was lit up.

While this may have been true for the smaller shadows however, it unfortunately turned out to work differently with the Neo shadow. While the light aura did keep the heartless at bay for a few seconds, it also agitated the Neo shadow and caused it to rush forward and deal Brown a massive slash to the face. Charlie Brown was once again sent flying, only this time he thankfully managed to land unsteadily on his feet.

Healed slightly but not quite enough to his liking, Charlie Brown stared down the heartless readying it's next attack and began forming light spheres in his hands. The Neo shadow observed the glowing yellow orbs in Charlie Brown's hands closely and planned it's next move carefully. It sank into the ground and slid up to underneath where Charlie Brown was standing. Frightened and knowing what was about to happen, Charlie Brown flew upwards to get out of the shadow's way. The Neo Shadow shot out from the ground, hand held out to grab Charlie Brown. Thinking quickly, Charlie Brown dropped both his light spheres down onto the heartless. By his first stroke of luck so far in this fight, both spheres hit their target, and the Neo Shadow plummeted back down to earth.

Cheers erupted over from the corner where Charlie Brown's friends watched, and even Charlie Brown looked extremely relieved. But Sparky continued to look serious, knowing that attack would hardly constitute a victory. And he was dead right. While the Neo Shadow remained relatively motionless on the ground for one short, to Charlie Brown glorious moment, it quickly got back onto it's feet and glared up at Charlie Brown.

Charlie Brown stared in disbelief at the Neo Shadow. How did it survive two light sphere attack at once? This probably had to do with it being a lot stronger than the smaller shadows. And in that case, Charlie Brown had no idea just how much force it would take to bring this shadow down.

While Charlie Brown worried, the Neo Shadow stood back and ran at the wall. With surprising athletic brilliance, the heartless managed to run right up the wall and, once at a suitable height it kicked off from the wall and pounced on the floating Charlie Brown.

The opponents landed hard on the ground, the Neo Shadow easily pinning Charlie Brown down. Charlie Brown struggled to loosen himself, but the monstrous shadow maintained a firm grip on him while slicing at his chest with a free hand. Charlie Brown felt the full torture of having his stomach cut open the whole time. It was only by covering himself once more in light that Charlie Brown managed to push the Neo Shadow off of him and deliver a hard punch to it's face. Charlie made to follow up with another punch, but the heartless grabbed his hand and headbutted him. Charlie Brown staggered backwards in pain as the Neo Shadow swiped at him, sending the boy sliding ten feet away.

Charlie Brown panted and spluttered, feeling the full pain of the shadows attacks overpower his healing ability for a moment. He was at a huge disadvantage here, no matter what he did this Neo Shadow could easily outmatch him. He could barely land a hit on it, much less a

finishing move, and it was a lot faster, stronger and smarter than the small shadows e had already been struggling against. How was he supposed to beat an opponent like this? He tried to think of a way to out-manuever the beast, but he was given hardly any time to think as the Neo shadow lunged at him again, kicking off from the ground and tackling hard into Charlie Brown.

The Peanuts winced and gasped as Charlie Brown was continuously pummeled by the Neo Shadow. No matter what move he made, the heartless was still able to outmatch him. To say they were all worried for him was putting it mildly.

"Aw man, Chuck's really taking a beating" Peppermint Patty said anxiously as the Neo shadow dodged a light beam and slugged Charlie Brown in the face.

"I don't know how he's going to get out of this" Freida said nervously.

"He's not" Violet sighed remorsefully, and everyone looked at her for clarification "We all know how it is with Charlie Brown. The only times he doesn't fail something straight away he's usually just setting himself up for a bigger failure. And unless he gets a sudden boost of power, I'm afraid this is going to be another one of those times"

"I really hate to admit it... but that sounds about right" Shermy said sadly, and they all lowered their heads in mourning. Except for Linus, who was humming thoughtfully.

After a moment of silence from the Peanuts, Linus spoke up "I have an idea that will either guarantee Charlie Brown a victory... or backfire horribly"

"What is it?" Lucy asked as she, Peppermint Patty and Sally looked curiously at Linus, who motioned for them to lean in closer so he could whisper his idea to them. When he was done the girls all pulled back, looking uncertain.

"That's a crazy idea" Peppermint Patty insisted "... But I guess it's worth a shot"

"Yeah, might as well" Lucy agreed, though she then grabbed Linus by the shirt and threatened "But if this goes wrong, it's gonna be YOU who pays the price. Got it!" Linus gulped and nodded fearfully at his older sister. Lucy released her grip on her brother as the four of them suddenly leapt out of their chairs and ran onto the battle field. The other Peanuts blinked at the sight, then once they registered what was happening they urgently called for Linus, Sally, Patty and Lucy to come back, but to no avail. Sparky also noticed what they were doing and prepared to stop them, but then froze in mid-air. Catching on to what the kids were up to, Sparky pulled back and decided, just for this moment, to let things play out.

Charlie Brown was down on the ground again, struggling to get up as his healing factor was finally starting to slow down. The Neo Shadow looked down hungrily at him, knowing this was it's perfect chance to finish the fight the heartless raised it's claws and...

SNAP

The heartless retracted it's aching right hand, and tried to shake off the pain. The large shadow turned around furiously, seeing that it's attacker was Linus with his security blanket fashioned into a whip.

"Hey you big dumb blockhead, pick on someone your own size!" Linus called to the heartless. Charlie Brown's eyes widened in horror.

"Linus... no" Charlie Brown gasped, but the Neo Shadow had already started to charge at his best friend, claws raised to slice him into pieces. Until it was hit in the back of the head with a baseball.

The heartless turned around to face it's new attacker, which turned out to be Peppermint Patty tossing another baseball around in her hand. Lucy and Sally stood by her side, each holding a small stack of the balls.

"Good thing I always carry a few spare baseballs with me, huh?" Peppermint Patty asked as though she was very clever. Sally looked down questionably at the multiple baseballs in hers and Lucy's arms.

"And, just how deep are your pockets again?" Sally asked uncertainly. She didn't receive an answer as the heartless charged at the girls. Only to once again be distracted by Linus's blanket smacking it's head. The Neo Shadow made to ram him again, before his attention was once more caught by one of Peppermint Patty's baseballs. This cycle repeated itself multiple times as Charlie Brown desperately channeled light around himself, trying to force himself back onto his feet to get the heartless away from his friends.

After about a minute Peppermint Patty finally ran out of baseballs. And as luck would have it, Linus also managed to miss the Neo Shadow when he attempted to distract it away from the girls, so the savage heartless was now running full speed to assault Patty, Sally and Lucy. The girls gulped, with Sally quickly hiding behind Peppermint Patty as the tomboy and Lucy tried to look threatening in the face of danger. The Neo Shadow leaped up, ready to pounce on the girls like a wild cat. About a second before it could tackle them however, Charlie Brown jumped out of nowhere and pinned the beast down, grabbing the shadow monster by the neck and trying to hold it back.

"What are you thinking! Get out of here!" Charlie Brown yelled. Patty and Sally sighed in relief as Lucy huffed.

"Um, saving your life, what else?" Lucy asked semi-sarcastically. The Neo Shadow let out a wretched roar as it struggled to break free from Charlie Brown's hold. Charlie Brown was struggling even more to keep the shadow contained.

"My life's not in real danger, but you could end up feeling a lot of pain if you get in this thing's way! Get to where it's safe!" Charlie Brown ordered. And it was the firmest order he had ever given to anyone. The girls were surprised at this, but decided to obey him nonetheless and ran towards where Linus was standing.

A few seconds after the Neo Shadow broke free of Charlie Brown's

hold. After disappearing into the ground, it popped up right in front of the three girls once more, causing them to bump into each other as they screeched to a halt. The heartless glared down menacingly at the girls, who this time couldn't help but hide their fear.

Charlie Brown was once more in a panic. As the heartless glowered down at his friends and sister, his only thoughts were that he had to protect them. He had to keep them safe, no matter what. Pushing aside all other thoughts, Charlie Brown's conscious mind was suddenly taken over by previously unknown instincts. And acting on these instincts, Charlie Brown managed to launch a light beam from his palms with enough speed that it struck the Neo Shadow right in the face, sending it down onto it's back.

Peppermint Patty, Sally and Lucy stared in shock at the temporarily down heartless and looked back to Charlie Brown, who himself looked bemused that he'd actually landed that hit successfully. Shaking his head of these thoughts, Charlie Brown urgently motioned for the girls to keep going. They did so while exchanging smiles. It seemed Linus's plan was working.

As the girls finally rejoined Linus, the Neo Shadow raised it's head and shook off the pain. Seeing the four friends gathered and prepared to flee, the Neo Shadow immediately made a beeline for them, only to have CHarlie Brown fly in it's way with light covered fists.

"Oh no, this is between you and-" Charlie Brown was cut off as the Neo Shadow grabbed him by the head and shoved him aside, continuing after the other Peanuts, who it seemed to have recognised as easy prey. Linus and the girls gasped as the huge Shadow closed in on them, only to suddenly fall flat on it's face. The heartless struggled to move forward for a moment before looking back to find it's leg caught up in a chain made entirely of light. Not too far away, Charlie Brown was holding the other end of the chain, and looking entirely perplexed at how he had made it. It was this moment of uncertainty however that caused Charlie Brown to lose focus on keeping the chain solid, causing it to fade away and the heartless to charge once more at his friends.

Still looking confused at what the heck just happened, Charlie Brown shot off the ground and made to tackle the heartless again. This time he managed to grab it by the antenna and throw it away, giving his friends more time to escape. The Neo Shadow's glowing eyes settled on Charlie Brown, it's attention clearly fixed on him once more.

Charlie Brown made to punch it out, but the heartless dodged and swiped at his face, then kicked him in the gut. Charlie Brown managed to block the next two attacks aimed at his gut, but was left vulnerable to another swipe at his eyes, blinding him long enough for the shadow to kick him away. The Neo Shadow glared down at Charlie Brown, apparently wondering if it should finish him off. It would be easy to do while he was blinded. But no... right now it had other objectives.

A short trek away, Linus and the others had nearly made it back to the seats where the other Peanuts were gathered, though they were all motioning them to keep away unless they drew the heartless straight to them. The kids were only a few feet away from the seats when a shadow suddenly formed on the ground before them and the Neo Shadow

shot out. Before they could even react however the heartless struck them all with one powerful swipe of it's muscular arm, sending the four unlucky Peanuts flying across the room. The other young teenagers and small animals shuddered at the heartless standing before them, though for some reason none of them appeared to grab it's attention as the monster ran towards the four he had just attacked.

Over at the other side of the white room, Linus, Lucy, Sally and Peppermint Patty were all shaking off the impact. Linus looked up to see the Neo Shadow slowly stalking over to the group, which he nervously and silently pointed out to the others, who watched with equal terror as the heartless drew steadily closer.

Charlie Brown was finally regaining his vision when he saw the Neo Shadow moving towards his friends yet again. Charging in without thinking, Charlie Brown prepared to clobber the heartless with a barrage of light punches. The Neo shadow however simply dodged them, scratched Charlie Brown across the face, then fell back on it's hands and pulled back it's feet, before launching at Charlie Brown with a jump kick that sent him flying into the wall. Undeterred by this momentary distraction, the Neo Shadow continued towards the four unseated Peanuts. Those that were seated were in a terrified uproar.

"This has got to stop, it was bad enough when Charlie Brown was getting clobbered but if someone doesn't pull the plug on this training Linus and the others are going to get hurt even worse" Pigpen put it firmly.

"Don't worry, I'm sure Sparky knows when to call it off" Rerun said hopefully.

"If he were going to cancel the training session surely he would have done that by now" Franklin added thoughtfully.

"Maybe we should ask him" Marcie said, looking to where Sparky had been floating during the whole fight... only to find that the spirit was gone "... Or maybe not?"

"Huh? Hey, where'd he go!" Patty yelled, as all at once the kids began to panic at the absence of the spirit coupled with the increasingly grim circumstances for their friends.

"He can't have just flown off, not when Peppermint Patty and Linus and everyone are in danger, what's he thinking!?" Freida panicked.

While the Peanuts were all having a fit over the apparent absence of Sparky, none of them realized that Sparky had not left the training room at all, but rather he had turned invisible, and was now floating close to Charlie Brown's fallen body.

The lack of visible injury on Charlie Brown appeared quite astonishing as he weakly lifted himself into a crawling position and painfully raised his head. The Neo Shadow moved closer and closer to his friends, claws sheaved and ready to slice. Charlie Brown looked on in plain terror, his usual sense of failure and pity took over he felt he could do nothing more but watch as his friends were brutalised by the overpowered shadow. That was when Sparky began to

whisper into his ear.

"You're not going to just let this happen, are you?" Sparky's voice softly echoed. Charlie Brown looked around briefly for the spirit, but his eyes quickly settled back onto the heartless and his frightened friends.

"Things seem rough. The thought of beating this creature seems like a pipe dream at best. But are you going to let that stop you?"

Charlie Brown's face fell into a thoughtful frown as the voice continued.

"They are your friends, Sally is your sister. Do they not matter to you? Do you not have the desire to protect them even with your own life? Or are they not so important that you would just lie here and let that monster have it's way with them?"

Charlie Brown panted, looking more worried still "N... no"

"So if they matter so much to you, why are you just laying here? You are not dead yet, are you? Why don't you get to your feet?" Sparky voice was questioning, but also demanding. Simulateneous with his words, Charlie Brown began to push himself up, and made unsteadily to his feet.

"This battle isn't over. The heartless still stands, ready to cause more pain to those you love. You have to fight"

"I..." Charlie Brown gasped, his vision slightly blurry as he watched the heartless proudly stalk towards his defenseless friends. Tears welled up in his eyes, and it was with great shame that he replied "I... can't... I can't do it"

"Does that matter? You can still stand, so that means you can still try. Would it not be worth more to try and save them, rather than leave them to suffer?" Sparky's voice whispered. Charlie Brown looked thoughtful for a short moment before nodding.

"It does not matter if you can't succeed. All that matters is that you give it absolutely everything you've got. At the very least you can buy them more time to get away. So, don't just stand here, fight!"

The girls all stepped back as the heartless drew near. Linus tried to scare it off by whipping his blanket at it, but the Neo Shadow simply slapped the cloth away with the back of it's hand. Out of ideas, Linus began walking backwards aswell while Peppermint Patty tried to look intimidating by raising her fists.

"No battle is fought without reason. When you walked into this fight your only reason was to defend yourself, and perhaps also to prove to yourself that you had worph. But now you have another reason to fight... them. Your friends are in danger, and only you can save them. It does not matter if the odds are impossible, it does not matter if you are easily trounced, all that matters is that you keep them safe. At least, that's all that should matter. As long as your loved ones are protected, then the remaining outcome is inconsequential."

A faint aura of light began to build up around Charlie Brown. Then, as the boy's determination grew, so did the light around him. Spurred on by Sparky's unseen encouragement, Charlie Brown's will to fight had been reignited by the growing desire to protect his friends.

"To protect those you cherish, to dedicate every ounce of your life to safeguarding the people you love. To carry on defending them, even if it calls for self-sacrifice, even if all odds are dead-set against you. That is what it means to be a guardian. That is what it means to be a hero!"

Charlie Brown's aura exploded in a golden blaze, blinding the Peanuts watching from the safety of the seats. The Neo Shadow, which had raised its claw ready to strike down Linus first, sensed the enormous surge of power and turned around to find Charlie Brown, completely healed and glaring at the heartless with a look that plainly and furiously said "Back off"

"The time has come Charlie Brown. Don't give up. Fight!"

"Hey blockhead... leave my friends alone" Charlie Brown growled at the Neo Shadow. The shadow looked at him with a blank expression for a few seconds before casually turning back to the four Peanuts, their wide eyes locked on Charlie Brown, and raised its claw. Charlie Brown frowned and fired a beam of light at the heartless, hitting it straight in the back and sending it flying right through the gap between Sally and Lucy straight into the wall.

The four kids stared in amazement from the heartless slanted against the floor to Charlie Brown, who was flying forward to stand between them and the Neo Shadow. At first looking bewildered, excited smiles quickly crept up their faces.

"Ok. That was AWESOME" Sally said cheerfully. Charlie Brown couldn't help but smile as he looked over his friends.

"Are you all ok?" Charlie Brown asked earnestly. Peppermint Patty grinned and waved her hand nonchalantly.

"A little shook up from the flight, but we're all cool" Peppermint Patty replied calmly. Charlie Brown smiled, until his attention was caught by a low snarl as he saw the Neo Shadow get to its feet again, crouching into a fighting position. Charlie Brown faced the heartless with his own battle pose.

"Just back away carefully. Get to where it's safe, and watch out" Charlie Brown instructed. His four friends nodded and voiced their support and prepared to creep back to their seats as the Neo Shadow prepared to charge. Before she left, Lucy whispered "Be careful you old blockhead. And go get 'im"

Despite the use of blockhead, long deemed an insulting term, this was perhaps the most encouraging thing Lucy had ever said to Charlie Brown. And it raised his spirits slightly that she had said it.

Seeing four of its would-be-victims escaping, the Neo Shadow pounced forward and ran like a wild cat towards them. Charlie Brown erected a

light shield to block it's path, and the shadow began furiously slashing at the barrier. After enough swipes it managed to break the shield, but was then immediately met with a punch to the face from Charlie Brown. Angered, the Neo Shadow struck him back. Charlie Brown flew backwards through the air, but managed to steady himself and flew right at the Neo Shadow, tackling it to the ground. The two combatants rolled across the ground, each punching or scratching at the other as the heartless simultaneously tried to slip free from Charlie Brown's grip. After the Neo Shadow managed to roll on top of Charlie Brown, the young guardian kicked it u into the air with his feet and then blasted it in the chest with a light sphere, which sent the heartless crashing into the ceiling before falling with a thud on the ground before Charlie Brown.

Charlie Brown panted slightly, but otherwise looked completely ready for another round as the heartless got up and rapidly fired several claw striked at him. With his light covered fists however Charlie Brown was able to block most of these attacks, and even managed to grab a hold of the Neo Shadow's wrist and flip it over onto it's head.

Charlie Brown's friends gasped as they watched the fight, before continuing on their way to their seats. The Neo Shadow looked up and saw them running, and began to charge after them. Charlie Brown leaped up and landed on the Neo Shadow's head to stop it, but as the heartless crashed onto the floor it kicked him off, sending Charlie Brown down on his own face. The heartless crawled over Charlie Brown and began to leap, only to have Charlie Brown grab it's leg and pull it down. The Neo Shadow made to kick Charlie Brown in the face, but the boy easily dodged that, got up and charged a light sphere into his palms. The Neo Shadow rose to it's feet, but was immediately impacted by said sphere and sent crashing into the wall.

The Neo Shadow shook it's head as it barely recovered from the assault. It looked over once more to Linus, Sally, Lucy and Peppermint Patty, only to find they had finally retaken their seats, all letting loose a heavy sigh of relief as they did so. With a growl over it's failure, the Neo Shadow turned once more to Charlie Brown, who was charging a large amount of light into his palms again. The Neo Shadow's eyes retracted in a menacing manner, and the heartless made to charge towards Charlie Brown.

The Peanuts watched on anxiously as Charlie Brown and the Neo Shadow readied their next Neo Shadow ran closer and closer to the boy, filled with blood lust and claws ready to cut Charlie Brown's head clean off. Charlie Brown made no other reaction to the charging beast other than to continue charging light energy. His friends watched on with their fingers crossed, Charlie Brown's continued lack of motion worrying them.

"Come on, fire!" Lucy yelled, worried as the heartless was quickly closing in. But Charlie Brown ignored her, eyes locked firmly on the Neo Shadow and waiting for just the right moment.

The Neo Shadow was quickly closing the gap between itself and Charlie Brown. It raised it's claws, only a moment away from shredding Charlie Brown. That's when Charlie Brown finally thrust his hands forward, unleashing the energy he had charged up in a gigantic burst of light. The heartless, only a few precious inches from Charlie Brown when the attack was launched, was immediately engulfed by the

attack, as all of the Peanuts were blinded by the beam. Charlie Brown's face contorted as he strained himself to keep the beam going. The Neo Shadow's dark silhouette was for a short while visible withing the giant blast of light, but after a while it's form began to dissolve until it was completely gone.

The beam continued until the intensity of it's light engulfed the entire room, then in an instant all returned how it had been moments before, only this time without the heartless. The Peanuts blinked to regain their vision, when their minds registered what had just went on they widened their eyes in Charlie Brown's direction. As for Charlie Brown himself, he at first continued to frown in the direction the heartless had been. Then slowly, as though he were coming out of a trance his expression softened, and he looked more surprised than anyone.

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"Did I just do that?" Charlie Brown asked himself. Over with the Peanuts, the youngsters remained silent for some time, none of them knowing quite what to say.

Then after a while, Linus finally offered something "I think Charlie Brown just one... .. HE WON!" Linus jumped into the air as he cheered this. His enthusiastic exclamations were quickly followed by loud cheers from the other Peanuts, Snoopy and Woodstock included, as they all burst out into applause for their friend. Charlie Brown for his part just stood their, silent and motionless. He didn't make any sort of reaction at all until his friends all ran forward to congratulate him and Peppermint Patty wrapped him in a bear hug.

"You did it Chuck, you beat the heartless! YOU DID IT! Aw Chuck, I could kiss ya!" Peppermint Patty cheered. Upon both registering what she had just said, Peppermint Patty released Charlie Brown from her grip and they turned away from one another, both beet red and looking awkward. Charlie Brown was about to say something when he was suddenly hugged by Sally.

"Oh big brother, I'm so glad we're alive! I'm so glad YOU'RE alive! Don't you ever, ever, ever worry me like that again!" Sally was happily saying as she hugged her brother tight. Through his gasps for breath Charlie Brown managed a small smile.

"It's alright Sally, we were never in any real dang-" Charlie Brown stopped when he realised Snoopy and Woodstock were both hugging his head, Snoopy even began licking him repeatedly before pulling away, looking as though the taste of Charlie Brown's head was not to his liking.

One by one the other Peanuts began appreciatively hugging Charlie Brown and praising his performance. At the back of the crowd, Violet silently waited her turn with a smile.

"I gotta admit... for all the times I've called him a failure face... that was pretty darn heroic" Violet thought to herself, smiling even more as Charlie Brown was clearly enjoying the attention he was suddenly getting.

Nearby Sparky's spirit was slowly turning visible again. Looking down at the friends gathered around Charlie Brown, Sparky could only smile. Grudgingly, he floated down to interrupt the chattering friends as Charlie Brown looked up at his smiling face.

"Congratulations Charlie. I think I speak for the whole universe when I say you've passed this part of your training with flying colours. You have right to be proud of yourself, my child" Sparky said with the air of a loving grandfather. Charlie Brown smiled wider, not having quite the right words to express his gratitude.

"I have a question" Pigpen piped up "When Linus, Sally, Patty and Lucy ran into the middle of that fight, why didn't you stop them?"

Sparky smiled, glancing over the four mentioned Peanuts "Perhaps the question you should ask is why did they do it" Everyone turned to Linus, who smirked proudly.

"Well, I saw that Charlie Brown was struggling out there against that heartless. I knew he was going to win if he kept up the way he was going. Then while thinking of how on earth he might get out of that situation, I remembered the time he beat Joe Agate at marbles. When he did that, he wasn't playing for himself, he was playing to win back Rerun's marbles. So then it hit me; maybe if Charlie Brown was fighting for the benefit of someone else, he might do a bit better. A big gamble, I know, but I had to do something, Charlie Brown was getting creamed. So, after explaining my idea to Sally and the others, we decided to get involved so that Charlie Brown would be fighting for us instead of just defending himself" Linus explained, all the while Sparky nodded and smiled.

"And that's exactly why I let you run out onto the battlefield" Sparky replied, and everyone looked at him again as he explained "Charlie Brown was never going to get a grasp over the true extent of his abilities merely fighting for himself. A Guardian of Light's job is to protect the entire Realm of Light and everyone in it, it is from our love of all life and our desire to protect everyone we love that we Guardians draw our true power. While Charlie could put up an even fight just defending himself, it wasn't enough to overcome a powerful opponent like that Neo Shadow. But when he saw you in danger, his newfound Guardian instincts began to kick in. His desire to protect you overcame his fears and worries, and he put your lives before his own. And as the danger to his friends grew worse, Charlie's will to defend grew stronger. And so did he. At that crucial moment before the Neo Shadow struck the four of you down, Charlie unlocked a greater amount of his hidden power, allowing him to defeat the heartless"

"Wow... this Guardian stuff is really deep" Franklin noted. Sparky nodded.

"It is indeed. And this is only the start of his training" Sparky turned to Charlie Brown "You still have a long way to go, the truth is you have only thus far unlocked ten percent of your full power, and it could take years before you reach your full potential. But I'm sure you'll keep at it, correct?" Sparky asked. Charlie Brown smiled and nodded respectfully. Sparky smiled aswell before looking to

Linus, Sally, Peppermint Patty and Lucy once more "And while I discourage such actions in the future, and I must ask that you never do anything like that in an actual battle, I must still thank you. Without your interference Charlie wouldn't have succeeded here today"

Lucy smirked smugly and examined the back of her hand "Aw, it was nothing"

The Peanuts rolled their eyes at this comment as Charlie Brown looked up at the spirit and asked "So... what now?"

"Well, you've completed the main phases of your training, but like I said there is always much more to learn. So now you all have two options, either go back to the rest room and enjoy the rest of your evening, or you can continue to train until it is time to retire to bed. It's your pick" Sparky replied. Charlie Brown thought for a moment, noticing that all his friends were staring at him.

"Well, I don't know. What do the rest of you want to do?" Charlie Brown asked his friends. The others placed a finger to their chins in thought. After a minute Lucy made a reply.

"Well, while that room was really cool and fancy, I really want to see Charlie Brown kick more butt" Lucy replied. The other Peanuts voiced their agreement, and Charlie Brown agreed too.

"Alright then. There's plenty of techniques I can teach you, but no point going over those tonight. Let's just review everything else you've learned. Everyone else, please return to your seats, this might take a while" Sparky explained.

And after that the rest of the night was pretty much routine. Charlie Brown practised more on the powers he had developed and worked to improve his performance. Occasionally he was pitted against a smaller horde of heartless, with the experience he had already had he managed to defeat them all a lot more easily. Though he did stumble a bit, being Charlie Brown, it was soon clear the new Guardian had gotten the hang of his new powers.

Charlie Brown continued for what felt like the next hour or so, taking a short break once every fifteen minutes before getting back to training. During one of these breaks, Charlie Brown and Linus were left alone in one corner of the training room as Sparky regaled the Peanuts with tales of his epic adventures protecting the Realm Of Light. Linus, knowing there must be a lot on his best friend's mind right about now, inched closer to Charlie Brown and decided to speak up.

"So, I see the trainings going great" Linus began with a word of encouragement. Charlie Brown smiled and nodded in response.

"I know. I can't believe it" Charlie Brown replied, surprising Linus with his proud smile "I mean I really can't believe it. My whole life I've never done anything as good as I am at this training. You know, when Sparky first told me I'd have to defend the universe from an evil Witch, I thought he was joking. Then I was terrified. Surely I wasn't cut out for this kind of thing, surely I was going to get myself killed if I tried. But now... I don't know what it is, whether it's just an instinct I inherited off Sparky, or if it's just me

feeling confident in myself for the very first time, but I honestly think I might be a good Guardian of Light after all. Don't get me wrong, I'm still worried I'm not, that's what I'm like after all, but I don't feel half as worried as I did at first. I think if I try, I really can be a hero"

Linus couldn't help but return Charlie Brown's smile of pride, it made him feel really good to finally see his best friend actually believe in himself for a change.

"Well Charlie Brown, I think you'll make a pretty great Guardian too" Linus said encouragingly. Charlie Brown smiled.

"Thanks Linus. And thanks for helping me out back there-don't ever worry like that again of course, but still thanks" Charlie Brown replied. Linus chuckled.

"You're welcome" Linus said. There was a moment of silence after that, a slightly awkward one as Linus tried to say what was on his mind "So, after this you'll be going on to defend the whole universe"

Charlie Brown's smile faltered, as the knot regrew in his stomach.

"Yeah, I guess that's going to be difficult" Charlie Brown admitted. Linus patted his back encouragingly.

"Don't worry, just do what you did today and I'm sure you'll do just fine" Linus replied, and Charlie Brown appreciated the support. He sighed however, as something much more depressing filled his mind.

"What I'm worried about isn't just whether I'll do good as a Guardian. What I'm worried about is having to leave. I really don't want to go away, I'd miss you guys too much" Charlie Brown explained. Linus looked down sadly and sighed.

"We're all going to miss you too. At least it's not going to be forever" Linus said semi-optimistically. Charlie Brown hummed thoughtfully.

"Say Linus, there's something else on my mind" Charlie Brown began, Linus gave him an imploring look "Well, it started with something Lucy said earlier about everyone wanting to finally start being nicer to me. And everyone was acting very strange when I explained about my powers, I expected Violet and Patty to laugh, but they didn't. I expected Lucy and Violet to ridicule me and say I'd be a terrible Guardian, but they actually seemed to support me. Only Sally reacted like I'd expect her too. And everyone's been real patient and nice to me since this all started, and I was sure everyone was mad at me about that baseball game. So, why's everyone acting like that all of a sudden?"

For a moment Linus stayed silent, contemplating the right words to answer that.

"It's because we all feel like a bunch of jerks for how we acted" Charlie Brown stared questioningly at Linus when he said that "You know how we all treat you Charlie Brown, even me sometimes. We all

get mad at you for everything and blame all our problems on you, but you've done so much for each of us. You're a great guy Charlie Brown, the greatest of us all really, and we treat you like dirt half the time. Some more than others, but you really don't deserve how people act to you. Franklin put it to us straight, and after some thought we decided we really needed to start making it up to you. Really unlucky coincidence how you have to leave now, huh"

"Well that's just my luck I guess" Charlie Brown replied, surprised by the answer. He thought long and hard over what Linus said, and the thought that his friends really wanted to act nicer to him was really encouraging. And of course it added a few extra knots of misery over having to leave them. Linus shuffled his feet and spoke up again.

"I hope you get time off to visit soon, we all really want you in our lives Charlie Brown. It's just not going to be the same without you" Linus said. Charlie Brown smiled at him.

"I'll see what I can do about that. Thanks Linus" Charlie Brown said kindly.

"Don't thank me, thank Franklin" Linus replied, gesturing over to Franklin among the other Peanuts. It looked like Sparky was just wrapping up his tale.

And he had, as he floated forward slightly and called "Alright Charlie, ready to continue fighting heartless?"

Charlie Brown looked at Linus, who nodded encouragingly. Charlie Brown smiled, there were plenty of things he wanted to say to his best friend, but so little time to say them.

Charlie Brown got up and continued his training. The routine target practise and heartless fighting went on for another half an hour, before Sparky finally decided enough was enough.

"Ok, I think we'll leave it there for tonight. Outside of this room it is now ten o'clock, past your bed times I believe" Sparky announced to the room. Everyone groaned, but followed Sparky as he led them out of the room. Unsure where they were going, the youngsters followed Sparky back to the room they had originally arrived in and through another door at the other side of the room, leading of course to another hallway full of doors. But these doors served a different purpose, as Sparky explained.

"These are the bed chambers. Each of these doors leads to a differently designed bedroom. I've never really had need of these rooms, since I so rarely have guests, but they should suffice for you all, I hope. I don't know what sort of rooms you're used to sleeping in, but that's your choice. No opposite gender roommates" Sparky explained. Lucy and Sally both moaned loudly, while Schroeder and Linus sighed in relief. Sparky chuckled as the Peanuts began looking between the doors for suitable rooms.

"Charlie, your room is behind the largest door with the sun symbol. Or at least, that's the room I always slept in, but it's your choice" Sparky said to his successor.

"I'll sleep there. Is there a doghouse for Snoopy to sleep on?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Well... yes. I am a dog myself, so, yeah" Sparky chuckled. After a few minutes the other Peanuts seemed to find rooms they liked and began saying goodnight to each other. Everyone looked to Charlie Brown last, all clearly having a lot they wanted to say.

"Um..." Lucy began. Charlie Brown realised this was the first time they all had to talk to each other without being distracted by something since arriving in the light palace, and everyone wanted to do as Linus said and apologise to Charlie Brown for the way they had been acting towards him. But being tired, and with everything else on their minds, that was obviously difficult right now.

"Well, uh... Charlie Brown..." Violet began, but shook her head and sighed "Never mind, I'll tell you in the morning"

"Oh, yeah... in the morning" Charlie Brown sighed aswell. After and awkward silence Violet waved goodnight. Everyone else said their goodnights to Charlie Brown, Sally also giving him a hug, before entering their bedrooms for the night. Charlie Brown watched silently after his friends for a while before Sparky floated down by his side.

"Are you alright?" Sparky asked. Charlie Brown nodded, but Sparky saw through him "I know this is a difficult time for you Charlie, but trust me, it's going to be alright. They're going to be alright. We'll sort it out so that they'll all be safe and happy at home, ok?"

Charlie Brown was quiet for a moment before sighing "Ok"

Another moment of silence passed as Charlie Brown contemplated everything he was going to have to do. The whole universe was in danger, the Dark Witch wanted to shroud everything in darkness. And here he was, still worrying about his friends above all else. Was that selfish? Or was that being a Guardian. The on thing he wanted right now, he realised, was to keep them safe from harms way. And he was going to have to do that for all the people in the universe. It was a big responsibility, but was he really the person that could live up to it. Charlie Brown decided, he would have to make himself that person, for their sakes.

"Snoopy, Woodstock, you can just run along to bed. I'll be with you soon" Charlie Brown instructed to his pet and his bird buddy, who exchanged uncertain looks and nodded before hopping off to the room Sparky had described as Charlie Brown. Sparky raised an eyebrow, then realised what Charlie Brown was thinking.

"Not going to sleep just yet?" Sparky asked knowingly.

"No, I still need to get better. I need to do everything I can if I want to be a good Guardian. I need to train some more. Is that alright?" Charlie Brown implored. Sparky smiled proudly.

"Ok, but only for one hour. Guardians need to sleep too you know" Sparky said like a mother telling her child how long they had before going to bed. Charlie Brown smiled thankfully to the Guardian and slowly began walking back towards the training room.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, in the Realm of Darkness, a place where everything was pitch black and mostly empty apart from the occasional sight of the residents, Joe Agate was having a bit of a training session of his own. Following the teachings of the Dark Witch, the bully had learned basically the same techniques as Charlie Brown had been taught, but with darkness in rue of light, obviously. The only other big difference was that Joe was having a much happier time smashing stuff up.<p>

Right now Joe was engaged in a battle with a number of armoured heartless. The Witch, Eggman and Thibault watched with sinister glee as Joe tore the false heartless apart.

The Warrior of darkness started by obliterating two heartless straight away with a couple of dark spheres. He allowed the remaining heartless to charge at him, as they pounced to dogpile on the boy. Joe expertly leapt over them, firing a beam onto the back of a Large Body type heartless and tearing a big gaping hole through it's chest. The heartless staggered and fell to the floor, but faded away seconds from hitting the ground.

Two of the normal heartless variety popped up at either side of Joe, who simply grabbed the antennas of the one on his left and threw it into the one on his right. The heartless recoiled on the floor as Joe towered over them, a merciless look on his face as he obliterated them with a beam of darkness from his hand.

The armoured heartless charged once more to dogpile on Joe. The Agate boy merely waited until they pounced and held up his hands, blasting the heartless with massive bolts of dark lightning. The heartless illusions squirmed in pain as the lightning engulfed them, and they soon dispersed aswell.

Joe smirked with pleasure at what he'd just done as a final shadow heartless tried to sneak up behind him. But Joe sensed it's presence. He channelled some more darkness into his left hand and formed it into a sword. Spinning around, Joe used this dark blade to slice the heartless' head clean off. The shadow's headless body fell to the floor as the creature slowly started to fade away into darkness.

Joe walked away from the scene of the carnage while wiping the dust off his hands. His three cohorts looked pleased.

"Well I must admit I had my doubts, but you were right my dear. This boy really knows how to utilise the darkness to it's full potential" Eggman said to the Witch, who placed her scabby fingers together in a calculating manner.

"Indeed" The Witch said, her eyes glowing with sinister intent as she watched Joe approach her.

"Alright Joe, that was wicked cool man! I tell ya, Charlie Brown won't last five seconds against you!" Thibault praised his friends ability, Joe grinned smugly and walked past him, looking up into the face of the Witch.

"I just have one question" Joe began. He lit his hands up with darkness as an evil grin crept up his face "When do I get to fight Brown?"

"Tomorrow, my dear boy" The Witch said, shrinking the size of her body and floating around Joe Agate in a shadowy manner "You have done well with your training, so take a rest. Sleep, relax, for tomorrow you may finally have your revenge"

Joe's grin grew wider as he imagined all the inhumane ways he planned to torture Charlie Brown when next they met. Oh, tomorrow had better come quickly.

"So, where's Charlie Brown too now anyway?" Thibault asked curiously.

"I don't sense my brother's power on your world anymore, so I imagine he's just been doing his own bit of training at the Light Palace" The Witch said as she tapped her chin with one finger, thinking, wondering... "Buuuut no need to worry. If he's half the sadsac you make him out to be, I'm sure he'll still be an easy target by tomorrow"

"But his current whereabouts do beg the question: How are we supposed to send Joe to confront Charlie Brown when we denizens of the darkness do not have access to the Light Palace?" Eggman pointed out.

"Well, there are two ways we can go about that. Either we can wait for him to appear on one of the worlds I can transport Joe to in the Realm of Light" The Witch began, being continued by Joe.

"Or we can lure him out" Agate concluded. Eggman and Thibault nodded approvingly.

"And I trust you have a plan in mind for this?" The scientist questioned.

"Oh, I've got a plan alright" Joe said, his creepy smile growing wider still as he placed his fingers together in the same way as The Dark Witch...

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Well, that's that done. Chapters all finished. To be honest I wasn't sure how to handle Charlie Brown's training, since he needs to do a lot for the fight next chapter, so I decided to skip over a lot of stuff that would have been repetitive anyway and leave a few things to the imagination. I like the ending scene with Joe too. Again, I didn't want to be repetetive, and as for Joe I wanted to give the impression that he can easily handle his own powers anyway and that he's a bit better at them than Charlie Brown even. I have a few issues with this chapter, in particular I think the quality sort of dropped after Charlie Brown was halfway through the fight with the Neo Shadow, it all didn't come out as good as I wanted it after that, but I promise next chapter will make up for it. The next chapter features the most epic battle I've ever written and a lot of other great scenes, I'm more proud of it than the rest of these chapters. I hope I explained the workings of Charlie Brown's powers properly here, again I could have done better, but that's all in the past. Additionally I've changed the listings for the series that will be featured in this story. First and foremost, Phineas and Ferb is cut. Sorry, I'm disappointed by that too, but after reviewing

the plot it wouldn't have fit in as well as I'd have hoped. So, what other changes have I made. Well, here's the new list. Remember, stars mean they will be featured in the next arc:

Peanuts (Main series)

Mario*

Sonic*

Powerpuff Girls*

Spiderman, plus wider Marvel universe*

Ed Edd n Eddy

Crash Bandicoot*

Harry Potter*

Pokemon*

Dragon Ball Z*

Simpsons

Spyro the Dragon (Mix of original series with elements of the Legend series, probably no reference to Skylanders, though that might be features as an alternate universe)

Rayman

Chronicles of Narnia

Jackie Chan Adventures*

Xiaolin Showdown*

Kim Possible

Code Lyoko

Naruto

Kingdom Hearts (Just the heartless, might introduce keyblades)

Ratchet and Clank

Young Justice*

Lilo and Stitch

Yu-gi-oh (Just Exodia, probably not full crossover)

Ben 10 Ultimate Alien

Hey Arnold (optional)

****Tiger Lover 16: The Hey Arnold world is classed as optional because**

I'm still reviewing those characters' place in the plot. I'm also considering Star Wars, but that's still optional. I'll have the final listings next chapter, so if there's any other series you'd like to see in this crossover, tell me now or you won't get another chance. Well, that's all for now. Hope you enjoyed the chapter, I'll be going back to edit it in the future and make improvements. So for now, bye.**

6. Light vs Dark: Part 1

Tiger Lover 16: Hey folks, am I back already? Well yes, I said I would be, right. I have a few things to say, but honestly I don't want to waste your time until the end, for now please enjoy the MOST EPIC thing I've ever written, the long awaited confrontation between Charlie Brown and Joe Agate!

* * *

><p>Chapter 5: Light vs. Dark: Part 1

It was a normal day at Birchwood middle school. As the morning had just started the school was practically devoid of teachers and even the janitor and lunchladies were unseen, so the students all just gathered in the playground to enjoy their moment of peace before the inevitably boring hours of learning ahead of them.

No one yet realised that this day at school would be anything but boring. Little did the students realise that today, a battle would be fought to determine the fate of their world, and all others. Little did the youngsters know that after today, life would never be the same.

While none of them had any clue as to the dark twist of fate that was rapidly approaching, most of them were aware that something strange was going on.

"I'm not kidding, the gas station was completely obliterated and a house demolished! No one was hurt thank goodness, but the police have no idea what caused it" A thirteen year old boy named Roy wearing a sailor-type hat was explaining to two of his friends, the number named boy 5 and the one girl labeled popular who was known to treat people fairly, Peggy Jean.

"That's quite worrying" Peggy Jean noted "What could have caused all that?"

"That's the weird part, no one can figure it out!" Roy said dramatically, further worrying his friends "It can't have been the result of any natural disaster, there's been no signs of earthquakes or storms in recent times. It couldn't have been vandalism, because there were no remains whatsoever of the gas station, and even a maniac riding a bulldozer or carrying a bazooka couldn't have done that much damage. There are no remains of bombs or signs of any other type of explosion. There's no reasonable explanation whatsoever for what happened"

"And yet the gas station is no more and a house has been torn down" 5 added, placing a finger to his chin thoughtfully "Plus there was that golden, falling star from last night that no ones able to find..."

something really strange is going on here, I just don't know what..."

The three just-turned-teenagers gave a collective, thoughtful hum at the events last night. Meanwhile, another group nearby was having a most intriguing discussion of their own.

"And you know what else is strange, I haven't seen Joe Agate or Thibault around yet, and they're usually here at school first to terrorise the kids who get here after them" Said Freddie Fabulous, the star of several of the schools sports teams and a magor douchebag. Originally from Fremont, Freddie had moved to Birchwood two years ago, mostly to get revenge on Charlie Brown, Marcie and Snoopy for ruining his chances at winning the decathlon five years back.

"Even weirder than that, Crybaby Boobie told me the Peanuts gang were heading in the direction of the park the moment the falling star supposedly fell to earth, but nobodies seen any of them since" Supplied Melody Melody. A beautiful girl, Melody squared used her stunning good looks and knack for manipulating boys to become one of the most popular girls in school. However, she was twice the snob Violet and Patty were.

"I saw them, I even gave that no-good bitch Lucy what was coming to her" Said Molly Volley, who punched her fist into her palm to emphasise her point "But after that, they just completely vanished. You know something though... when I did see them the second time last night they all looked kinda spooked, as though I had just come close to catching them in the act. Of what I don't know. I saw something hiding in the tree too... something white and purple. I wasn't really in the mood to investigate though"

"Leave it to fat-legs Volley to blow our one chance at figuring out what the hells going on around here" Bad-call Benny quipped. This turned out to be one of his worst calls ever, as Molly quickly pounced on him afterwards, pinning him to the ground and beating him silly. Freddie and Melody Melody rolled their eyes at the two tennis players, until Freddie's attention was caught by a figure standing at the gates leading into the school.

"Well, there's one less mystery to ponder" Freddie commented. Molly and Benny ceased fighting for a moment to look in the direction Freddie and Melody were both staring. And they saw...

Joe Agate standing by the gate.

Joe stood calmly at the gates, observing the people who were formerly his fellow stuents, hanging around and laughing at jokes told by their friends, chatting about the absurdities from last night or practising for a sport they played. Thibault suddenly appeared at Joe's left side, and seconds later Doctor Eggman stood at his right.

"So, you blockheads remember the plan?" Joe questioned his cohorts, who both gave a stiff nod in response. Joe grinned "Alright then, let's get this show on the road"

The three followers of darkness walked onto the school grounds. The kids quickly took notice of their presence, and soon the whole

student body was staring questionably at them. Joe and Thibault were hated and feared of course, but it was the presence of Eggman that really got them wondering. The youth of Birchwood were not normally accustomed to seeing a lot of adults in their town, and none of them had ever seen Eggman, so his sudden appearance was enough to instigate a lot of whispering and finger pointing among the students.

The trio stopped when they reached the exact centre of the school's playground. Joe cleared his throat, making sure he had everyone's attention before he began his little speech.

"Greeting, students of Birchwood Middle School" Joe began, earning him more than a few raised eye brows "Now I'm sure I don't need to introduce myself, you all know that Thibault and I are the supreme bullies of Birchwood. But that's all in the past I'm afraid. You see, due to recent events I will no longer be attending this school"

At these words the students all burst out in applause, believing they were free of Joe's wrath forever. Joe smirked as he mused over these sentiments, and with a falsely pleasant smile he raised his hand to silence the kids.

"Please, let me finish" Joe said, the students all stopped talking, hoping for more good news.

"Yes, I shall soon be leaving Birchwood for a while. And furthermore, I've decided to give up bullying" Joe said. The students all looked eager, preparing their next wave of cheers "Yes, from now on I'm just gonna be a simple, humble... RULER OF THE UNIVERSE"

"Yay!" The students all cheered... then they all realised what Joe had said and went "What?!"

Joe snickered deviously at the bemused looks on the students' faces.

"Yeah, you heard right. Let's put it this way, any of you heard about the gas station and house that were destroyed on the other side of town?" Joe asked, a few students nodded, looking fearful, though most were just skeptical.

"Well, that was me. I destroyed the buildings!" Joe declared. Many kids gasped, backing away fearfully from the bully, though most just looked at him funny, certain he was lying.

"How did I do it? Well, anyone want to step forward so I can demonstrate?" Joe asked maliciously. The malice and spite in his voice was terrifying enough that even the students that didn't believe his claims were shaking with fear "Hmm, so no-one wants to be a test dummy? How disappointing..."

"Just what are you playing at Agate. Do you really expect us to believe what you're saying?" Freddie Fabulous asked rudely. Joe grinned evilly.

Before anyone else had a chance to react, Joe had raised his hand in Freddie's direction and, using his powers he contorted the shadows of the school building into a large shadowy hand, which picked Fabulous up by his legs and shook him around violently before smacking him

into the wall. Joe dismissed the shadowy hand and gave the dazed sports star a smug grin.

"Believe THAT" Joe spat.

To say the kids were frightened by this occurrence was a gross understatement. Within seconds the entire student body were in hysterics. The youngest students were all screaming at the top of their lungs, everyone was trying to run for it, but the crowds were so large they were all having trouble fighting through one another. Even the bravest of students had a look of pure shock on their face, some students were too shellshocked to move. Some were rubbing their eyes to determine if what they saw was real, deciding it was these students tried making a break for it too.

No one managed to make it off the school grounds though, because Joe had quickly set up a wall of darkness to block every possible escape route. Thibault laughed at the fear his friend was inspiring, taking great pleasure in the panic and screams of the students.

Deciding he'd had enough of their screaming, Joe hovered ten feet into the air, summoned two more shadow hands and made them clap together. Said clap produced not only a loud noise, but sent a shockwave across the playground, tripping most of the students up and knocking them back a bit. With the noise level suitably reduced Joe lowered himself to five feet off the ground and continued his prior speech.

"So, as you can see I have just acquired supernatural powers. I am now a complete master of darkness, the loyal follower of the Dark Witch, the Guardian of Darkness, and soon to be co-ruler of the universe. It's cool if you don't have any idea what I'm talking about, I didn't know about any of this Dark Witch or Guardian stuff until last night" Joe said, grinning with pleasure at the shocked and confused faces of the students "If you have any further questions, they should be answered as I deliver this broadcasted message"

This last statement confused the kids further, until they all looked down and saw that Eggman had somehow pulled out a red video camera and was positioning it to face Joe.

"So, everything in order Ivo?" Joe asked importantly.

"All set. And if my calculations are correct, and they always are of course, then our little broadcast should reach every television, computer and even movie screen on this planet" Eggman replied proudly.

"Perfect" Joe said maliciously. The students of Birchwood Junior High could only watch on in fear as Eggman switched on the camera, allowing Joe to announce their intentions to the world.

* * *

><p>Several blocks away, the Peanuts gang were all walking towards their school (Except for Rerun, as Lucy and Linus had already dropped him off at elementary school). Sparky floated above them, Charlie Brown had used his powers to render the spirit invisible to all onlookers, so he didn't attract any unwanted attention. The spirit was discussing a plan of action with the young ones.<p>

"Alright, so Charlie will explain to the teachers why he will no longer be attending the school, using the excuse we came up with and leaving out all details of his guardianship. I shall personally meet with the Brown parents to explain where he shall really be going. And the rest of you will continue on with your lives. Hopefully at this point my sister has not learned a lot about Charlie and his relations, so you should be safe for the time being. And as soon as this school day is over, Charlie Brown and I shall leave to begin this journey"

"And we'll probably never see him again" Lucy added bitterly. Charlie Brown and several other peanuts lowered their heads mournfully at this.

"It won't be like that Lucy. We will be back, Charlie Brown will not be separated from you forever" Sparky said as gently as possible.

"Yeah, just until your sis is locked away again" Peppermint Patty said grumpily.

"Which could take years" Sally unenthusiastically supplied. Everyone sighed.

"I really don't want to leave like this, but it has to be done. If I don't go I'd be letting everyone in the universe down. Including you guys" Charlie Brown said, trying to sound noble despite his overwhelming sense of regret. His friends could appreciate he was leaving them for a noble cause, and it was pretty cool that someone in their gang was going out to save the universe and be a great hero. After a lifetime of failures Charlie Brown did deserve this more than anyone... but that still didn't ease the pains of separation.

As the Peanuts continued on their short trek they passed by an electronics shop, the window display full of tvs on static. Another second and they might have passed by this store completely, but Pigpen, who was at the back of the pack, stuck around just long enough to see the screens go off, then flash back on. Only now it wasn't static playing on the twenty screens...

"Hello blockheads"

"What the heck!?" Violet gaped, the gang quickly gathered around the window to see Joe Agate's face on the many tvs.

"We interrupt this scheduled programming to bring this important message to a certain Guardian" Joe's voice rang twenty times. The gang tensed up at his words, and the fact the bully had actually gotten himself on tv "For those of you wondering who the hell I am and why I'm keeping you from watching the news, sports, or whatever garbage people watch at this time in the morning, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Joe Agate, formerly a student of Birchwood Junior High, son of class A drug dealer Alexander Agate, and apprentice to the Guardian of Darkness, The Dark Witch!"

The kids all gasped in horror. Had they heard that right? Joe Agate, apprentice to the Dark Witch? The mere fact he would know about the Witch was shocking enough, but her apprentice? How'd that happen?!

"I'm sure right now a lot of people are wondering what on earth I'm talking about. Well, screw you, 'cause I'm not bothered to repeat myself. This message goes out to one person, and one person only. I speak directly to you Charlie Brown!"

Charlie Brown listened intently to the maniacal bully, now really starting to worry.

"I know that you were chosen as the new Guardian of Light, for whatever ridiculous reason" Joe laughed mockingly "And while you may be a worthless excuse for a human being and even undeserving to count yourself among the lower lifeforms on this planet, I couldn't be happier for you. Or, to put it accurately, I couldn't be happier that your new job gives me the glorious opportunity to KILL YOU!"

The gang's eyes all drifted anxiously to their superpowered friend, they were surprised to find him glaring at the screen rather than shaking with fear.

"I suppose now you're being stuck up and thinking "Hey, I have unimaginable powers now, I can beat you easily" Well you can't! 'cause thanks to my dear friends Eggman and The Witch, I now have half of the latter's powers. And considering how hopeless you are at accomplishing the simplest tasks, I bet you haven't even mastered a mere ten percent of your full power, have you? I wouldn't be surprised if you were weaker than that. You better be afraid, you should be very afraid Charlie Brown. Now listen closely you blockhead, I have taken over the school, and I'm holding all your fellow students hostage. I demand for you to arrive here at this school within the next fifteen minutes, otherwise I will start killing these helpless fools. I'll start with the youngest students, then make my way up. I will kill an additional student for every minute you take to get here, and if they're all dead and you still haven't shown up, I will move on to demolish Birchwood and as much of this world as possible. And with all the power I feel now, I should easily be able to smash all of this planet into oblivion!"

The sheer malice and clear honesty of Joe's threat sent shivers down the kids' spines. They knew Joe Agate was a creep and a cunning bully, but they had no idea he could be so... there was no other word for it... Evil.

"The choice is yours Charlie Brown, come and face me or allow this whole pathetic world to perish. Either way all worlds will soon fall to the darkness. I just really want to fight you quickly, so I can have the full pleasure of beating you to a bloody pulp, torture you in the most inhumane ways possible, strip you of your powers, beat you again, then make you watch as I murder every one of your so-called-friends. And then, when your spirit has been shattered completely, and you beg me to put an end to your pointless existence, only then will I finally kill you... You have fifteen minutes, starting right now. And for all you folks at home, have a nice final day"

The screen blacked out once Joe had finished his threats, leaving the Peanuts frozen in fear.

"This is bad... this is very, very bad" Linus began, quickly taking shelter under his blanket.

"I should have seen this coming. Of course my sister would choose a warrior to help carry out her plans. Now, this is quite a predicament" Sparky said, staring at the screen in fear, the first time any of the gang had seen him truly frightened.

"So what now, are we gonna try and stop him?" Peppermint Patty asked. Charlie Brown gulped, suddenly wishing this wasn't his predicament to be in.

"I guess I have to try and stop him. The rest of you go and hide, save yourselves" Charlie Brown instructed, the shakiness in his voice drowning out the sense of authority he'd desired it to have.

"Are you nuts! No way we're letting you go after that monster alone! Right guys!?" Peppermint Patty asked definantly. She got no answer "... Uh, guys?"

She turned to see that most of her friends were looking at her in shocked bemusement. Then they all shuffled their feet and looked away nervously.

"Yeah, well um... yeah... um... well, it's not really our duty" The other Patty spoke first.

"And we would probably just get in the way" Schroeder added, backing away slowly.

"Or get killed" Freida made clear everyones worst fear. Peppermint Patty frowned furiously.

"HEY, you all agreed that we'd be there for Chuck when he needed us from now on! You all agreed to start acting more like good friends! And now you're gonna back out on him when he needs you by his side more than ever!?" The other Peanuts looked down mournfully.

"Oh alright, we'll go" Violet replied "I just hope we make it out of this, that's all"

"Really guys, you should go. If Joe's telling the truth and he does have the Witch's powers, then you'd all just be putting yourselves at risk. I can't ask you to do that" Charlie Brown tried to reason.

"Charlie Brown, you're our friend. We owe it to you to be there and cheer you on in this desparate time. We're willing to put our lives at risk, because we have faith you'll pull through" Linus responded, pulling his blanket off his head and looking dead serious at his friend.

Charlie Brown stared pleadingly at his best friend, silently pleading for him to see reason and hide where it was safe. But Linus's stubbornly determined look solidified his intention to be there for his friend. Charlie Brown stared between his friends, and it was clear that nothing he said would convince them to stay out of trouble. Despareately he looked to Sparky for guidance, but the spirit shook his head. It appeared the spirit didn't think he could do any better at persuading the others. With a sigh of defeat, Charlie Brown knew he'd have no choice but to let his friends tag along.

"Ok, but everyone just stay where it's safe, alright" Said Charlie Brown, the Peanuts nodded their heads, glad he saw it their way.

"Well come on then, we've only got a few minutes to get there before someone dies!" Pigpen pointed out. Realizing this Charlie Brown nodded his head in confirmation and began leading the gang in the direction of the school. But after only five steps he stopped, going completely still.

"Charlie Brown, what's wrong?" Linus asked. He walked closer to Charlie Brown and saw that ever familiar look of insecurity and doubt he would often wear. Realising everyone was looking at him now, Charlie Brown looked down at his feet and sighed.

"I can't do it" Charlie Brown cried, his hands shaking and tears staining his cheeks "I'm not ready for this. It doesn't matter if I have powers, I'm still just Charlie Brown, a blockhead that can't do anything right. I just can't fight Joe..."

The kids watched sadly as their friend cried out his feelings of worry and doubt. They all wanted to say something to comfort him. But what could they say... ultimately it was Sparky who decided to speak up.

"I know the prospect of fighting someone with the power of my sister is terrifying Charlie Brown. And I appreciate that we haven't had enough time to train you. But you have to be strong" Sparky told his successor, solidifying his hand slightly to pat Charlie Brown's shoulder in a fatherly manner "As Guardian of Light you will constantly be called upon to face threats of this level, you understand that, correct? This turn of events is worrying and unexpected, but you have to believe in yourself. You're stronger than you think, and we all believe in you. So put your woes aside, there's a whole planet depending on you to save it, and we'll be with you all the way"

Charlie Brown stared in awe at the ghostly Guardian, his words actually bringing him some comfort. He looked between his friends, they all wore those same looks of determination on their face as they urged him to go on and succeed in running Joe out. A smile lit up Charlie Brown's face. It amazed him that despite his doubt, despite his inexperience, Sparky really did believe he could do it. They all believed.

"Maybe I can beat Joe, maybe I can't" Charlie Brown started "But either way, I'll still try"

Charlie Brown's friends cheered for his resolve, the Guardian smiled gratefully at the support they were-

"Hello! Joe threatening to kill students if we don't hurry up! Remember?!" Lucy loudly pointed out. Charlie Brown blinked, his expression turning frantic as he realised what she said.

"Oh yeah!" Charlie Brown said before speeding off in the direction of the school. His friends quickly ran after him, Sparky floating at the front of the pack. Charlie Brown ran at full speed, ready to confront Joe. One thing was for sure, he thought. However this fight turned

out, it was going to be fun.

* * *

><p>Back at the school Joe Agate was hovering back down onto the ground after haveing sent his threatening message throughout the world. He didn't know if Charlie Brown was currently even on this planet anymore, but if the whole world was aware of his threats that should be enough to catch the attention of the Ancients and Sparky, which would certainly lead Charlie Brown to him either way. And Charlie Brown would have to show up if he started destroying parts of the planet, so whatever happened within the next few minutes, Joe knew he would get what he wanted in the end.<p>

And in the meantime, he could stick around and enjoy the terror that was sweeping through his captives. Agate's declaration had inspired utmost fear in the hearts of the students, all of whom were backed up against either the school or the gates. The dark barrier still blocked them from leaving.

"Well, yes, now while that was very good, I might ask... the part about killing one student per minute... that was just a bluff, right" Dr Eggman asked awkwardly to his superior. While he may have been an evil scientist, the bad doctor did have his own moral code. Despite the damage his robots and superweapons caused he never aimed to directly kill anyone. He realised that was perhaps part of the reason his plans were always foiled by Sonic, but he just couldn't bring himself to murder. Especially when the victims were a school full of kids, and then even a whole planet.

Joe smiled, catching onto these sentiments, and identifying them as a weakness in the fat villain.

"It's no bluff Eggman, if Brown doesn't show up here in the next fifteen-now fourteen minutes, we start killing" Joe said casually, as though he was merely discussing the weather. The dark one grinned at Eggman's grimace "Not having seconds thoughts, are we?"

Eggman looked surprised and shook his head fretfully.

"No-no, nothing like that. I mean-it's just-don't you think it's a bit extreme? I mean, these people are your fellow students. Your peers, cohorts, possibly friends. Don't you think it would be unfair to them to end their lives over this?" Eggman tried to reason. Several students nearby nodded their heads anxiously, pleading to God that Agate agreed with the scientist. But Joe's maniacal smile dashed any hope of this.

"These people are not my friends, I could care less about what happens to them. If you're squimish you don't have to do any of the dirty work, it'll be more fun for me to do it anyway" Joe said, surrounding his fist with dark energy to add to the malice of his statement. As the students shuddered and groaned fearfully, most even too afraid to move, Dr Eggman gave one last pleading look to his leader and nodded remorsefully. Joe grinned victoriously and began circling around the school grounds.

_ 'I don't know if he's really just this maniacal... or if all that dark power has corrupted his soul to the point he's become as vicious and insane as The Witch herself. Either way, this kid has lost all

sense of humanity'_ Eggman thought fearfully.

The students backed away as well as they could when all cramped together as Joe walked passed them, looking thoughtful.

"But then again, I suppose we can find use for SOME of them" Joe admitted. He returned to the centre of the playground where Thibault and Eggman were standing to make one more announcement.

"Listen up folks, I have a deal for you all!" Joe called, the students leaned forward, all listening closely "Now while most of you I'm quite happy to just kill and be done with you, I'm willing to spare your lives. On one condition. If any of you wish you may join us. Become a member of the Dark Empire, swear your allegiance to me and the Dark Witch, and not only shall I spare your miserable lives, I also promise you'll get your own special powers"

This thought intruiged some of the students, particularly those that really, really wanted to live through this. Others were apprehencive though, not sure if they could trust Agate.

"Deep consideration should be taken before joining however. You will be expected to carry out crimes against humanity and lay waste to worlds within the realm of light, at the same time surrendering your heart to darkness. You should all really-OOP!" Eggman clutched his stomach after Joe punched him to shut him up.

"Like I said, you're all free to join us. Trust me, it's either join up with us, or rely on Charlie "Failure Face" Brown to save you, and we all know how that's gonna go, I'm sure" Joe said humorously. Try as they might, the students couldn't help but agree with that last statement.

Joe and Thibault watched as the students all contenplated their options. Would they be willing to surrender themselves to darkness? Were they ok with working for Agate? Was there any hope of Charlie Brown, if he was a hero, defeating Joe Agate and saving them? Would he even show up?

For the first two minutes no-one reacted. Then just as Joe was beginning to get bored, a familiar voice called out "I'll join you!"

Gasps echoed through the crowds of students as Freddie Fabulous tore away from the pack and walked straight up to the thirteen year old terrorist.

"I don't particularly like you or Thibault, Joe, but I do admit your powers are pretty awesome. If you can get me some of those I'm definitely in. Besides, I really want to see that ol' pumpkin head get clobbered, so you already have my sympathies" The sports star explained. Joe smiled nicely and patted Freddie on the shoulder.

"Welcome to the winning side Fabulous" Joe greeted, motioning for the fellow bully to stand between Thibault and Eggman. Joe turned back to the crowd of students to see another figure had stepped forward. To the surpise of many, it was Melody Melody.

"I guess I'll join you too" Melody said plainly "I mean, it's not

like I have any better options. And I've always been attracted to power. If you guys are aiming for universal domination like you say, then I'm all for it"

"Glad to have you aboard miss Melody" Joe said, surprisingly polite.

"OH NO! NO WAY" Thibault suddenly yelled, earning annoyed glares from his friend and Melody as he began ranting "I agree we need more cronies, but there's NO WAY I'm working with girls. She'd just get in the way with her sissiness. It's not like girls have any practical skills apart from cooking, cleaning and looking good naked anyway!"

POW!

A quick slug to the face from Melody Melody sent Thibault flying ten feet backwards into the dark barrier. The sexist punk landed with a thud on the ground, too dazed to form a single comeback.

"No practical skills, huh?" Melody said sarcastically. She stood at Thibault's previous position tall and proud, boldly declaring herself an equal member of this entourage. Joe sniggered.

"Please tell me someone recorded that" Joe said through a fit of laughter.

Another minute passed in silence as Eggman tried to support the dizzy Thibault back onto his feet. The kids continued to ponder over whether they should join Agate, and still waiting on Charlie Brown to show up and maybe save them already. While Peggy Jean and Roy were whispering potential escape plans to save their fellow students, Molly Volley scratched her head thoughtfully. She wasn't an evil person, oh no, and she didn't have anything against Charlie Brown. But then again, she didn't think he stood a chance against Joe, and she usually rooted for whoever was likely to win. So with that, she began to step forward to join Agate's team.

"I'm in!"

Molly blinked when she realised someone else had said that at the same time as her. She turned to see Bad-Call Benny had also stepped forward. The two tennis players exchanged uncertain looks and then frowned.

"Oh, no way!" They both shouted.

"I'm joining with Agate, but there's NO WAY IN HELL I'm working with you, twerp. Get back in line!" Molly roared, pointing to the crowd of students.

"No way fat-legs, I'm on this team, you get back in line!" Bad-Call shot back.

"Stop calling me that! And you get back there!" Molly screamed, clenching her fist.

"No, I should be on Agate's team. I'm way better than you!" Bad-Call declared.

"I'm older, so that gives me more authority than you!" Molly growled.

"You're only older by two weeks! I say I'm on this team, you get lost" Bad Call snidely shot back.

"No you!"

"No you!"

"No you!"

"No you!"

"Don't make me slug you!"

"Go f-"

"ENOUGH!"

The two tennis players were knocked off their feet by the high volume of Joe's voice. The darkness weilder glared down at the two nuisances.

"You can both be a part of our empire, and you can both just BE QUIET ABOUT IT" Joe said irritably. Both gulping, Molly and Benny quickly hopped over to where the rest of Joe's followers were standing and remained silent, though still glaring at each other at all times.

Joe waited for anyone else to step up and join him. After much consideration, Tapioca Pudding and Lydia both stepped forward.

"I don't really like this, but Charlie Brown sure ain't gonna save us. So, I'm in too" Tapioca said nervously.

"I'm in for the same reasons. And besides, it might be fun" Lydia offered as her explanation. Joe nodded curtly and had them join the rest of the group. Thibault, having regained full sense, was starting to grumble.

"What is it with all these girls joining us?" Thibault whispered. He was however overheard by Tapioca, who gave him a sharp punch on the shoulder, making the short punk gasp in agony.

Next up was Charlotte Braun. The new members of Joe's Dark Empire covered their ears when they saw her approach.

"I WANNA JOIN TOO! I HATE THAT CHARLIE BROWN, I WAS FRIENDS WITH HIM FOR A WEEK BUT THEN HE STARTED COMPLETELY IGNORING ME! I DON'T LIKE BEING IGNORED!" Charlotte screeched, her excessively loud voice shattering the school's windows. Joe nursed his bleeding ears for a moment before nervously motioning for Braun to take a place with the others. The other villains made sure to keep a safe distance from her though.

With the fifteen minutes Joe had given Charlie Brown running out the students were all starting to panic. Should they continue to wait and hope Charlie Brown would save them, or should they side up with Agate and be spared his wrath. Joe Richkid decided, he would choose

Agate.

"I'm not offering myself up for any manual labour, but I can provide some healthy funds for you to perform your operations. Provided I get some of these powers you promise" Joe said, making sure he sounded sophisticated and dignified the whole time. Agate chuckled.

"Sure thing Richy, welcome aboard" Joe said. The other Joe gracefully walked over to the evil group, when Agate slyly added "'Course, now we own every last penny you have, but that's cool, right"

This caused the rich boy's graceful trot to falter, and he looked terrified at the mere thought of losing his fortune.

Agate continued to chuckle as baseball star Jose Peterson ran forward.

"Count me in too, I wanna live" Jose said, joining Joe's group without waiting for a single word from the leader.

Joe grinned at the modest amount of followers he had so far assembled and turned back to the crowd of students that remained undecided. Spotting Crybaby Boobie, the third most prominent tennis player in the school after Molly and Benny, he asked "Don't suppose you want to join, do you Crybaby?"

Crybaby, who moments ago had just been watching fearfully, opened her mouth really, really wide and whined "NO I DON'T! I don't want to join you guys, you're all mean and evil and out to make me sad! Molly and Benny never stop arguing, Freddie's rude to me, Melody's even worse, and I don't wanna be evil! I doooooon't!" But immediately after she closed her mouth and sadly whimpered "But I guess I have no other choice. So, ok"

And with a downtrodden look on her face Crybaby took up a spot between Molly and Bad-Call Benny, who both face palmed over having their most whiney rival in this stupid team.

Joe Agate checked his watch. Only four minutes left until he started killing the hostages, and Charlie Brown still hadn't shown up. Realising the dark barrier was probably stopping them he opened up a passage by the gate and ordered Eggman, Freddie Fabulous and Jose Peterson to make sure nobody got out, but Brown could get it. He then turned back to the crowd of students to see if any more would join them. He grinned slyly when he saw Peggy Jean looking on with a stern and defiant face and slowly stalked over to her.

"So, how about you my dear?" Joe asked. Peggy Jean folded her arms and glared.

"No"

The students gasped, all looking at Peggy Jean as though she had gone mad. Joe raised an eyebrow and laughed playfully.

"Aww, why not? Think Charlie Brown is gonna save you" Joe asked mockingly.

"As a matter of fact, I do" Peggy replied confidently. The playground suddenly fell silent, and all sign of humour vanished from Joe's

face.

"Excuse me?" Joe asked sternly.

"I believe in Brownie Charles. If what you say is true, and that he's some sort of Guardian of Light, then I know he'll come to save us" Peggy declared, sounding confident and determined that she was right. The students closest began whispering, while Joe sneered.

"Oh please, the guy's a complete blockhead. I'll slaughter him! You can't honestly think he's actually going to save you" Joe said distastefully.

"I'd rather put my faith in him than in you" Peggy said sternly "I know Brownie Charles isn't the type of person most would consider a hero, but he's a much better person than you. He's kind, thoughtful and would put his all into helping others! I believe he'll save us, and nothing you say will get me to think otherwise"

"Oh please" Joe groaned. But Peggy wasn't alone in her views.

"I believe in Charlie Brown too!" Declared 5, earning a glare from Joe and sneers from Thibault and the other dark followers "He beat you before at marbles, and he'll beat you here! So what if he's a blockhead, I have faith in him!"

"Here, here" Roy chanted. And more and more, the other students spoke up to show their support of the platinum-blond teen.

"Yeah, just you wait Agate. Charlie Brown's gonna come here and kick your butt!" A boy named Ethan declare a bit further along.

"I agree, Charles is a great guy, of course he can do it!" Piped in Eudora, Sally's best friend.

"Charlie Brown may have his faults, but he has a lot more heart than most people. I choose to believe in him" A blond girl named Janice spoke up, her and Eudora stepping forward to stand with Peggy Jean, whom along with 5, Roy and Ethan were essentially starting to form a mob before Joe.

"I don't know him much, but from everything my cousin Marcie has told me I'm sure Charlie Brown stands at least an even chance against you. I support him too" Said Maynard, a fairly nerdy looking boy with a funny looking face.

"Yeah, go Charlie Brown!" Called a girl scout named Loretta.

Joe watched on in shock as, one by one, more students began declaring their loyalty to Charlie Brown, and their refusal to join Joe. The super-powered bully growled as he turned once more to Peggy Jean at the centre of the crowd.

"Looks like the common consensus is that Brownie Charles is the favoured fighter" Peggy Jean said proudly. Joe just laughed cruelly.

"Believe what you want to believe my dear. I was gonna offer you a sort of third in command position, but-" Joe grinned evilly as he checked his watch, worrying Peggy's friends "It just happens the

times up, and he's still not here"

Fear was quickly overcoming the students once more. Everyone looked around anxiously for any sign of the hero, but it appeared he was a no show. Joe grinned evilly.

"And since he's not here, I guess it's time to live up to my threats. And since you're the most defiantly loyal to the blockhead..." Joe lit his fist up with dark energy. Roy and 5 hopped in front of their friend, but they were pushed far out of the way by Joe and his powers. Peggy Jean looked frightened, but refused to let go of her faith.

"You can still back out, my dear" Joe said craftily "I'm still willing to let you live. All you have to do, is swear your loyalties to me"

Peggy Jean frowned defiantly at this suggestion.

"No way, Agate. Not again" Peggy said, memories from years ago reforming in her mind "I swear, the biggest mistake in my life was breaking up with Brownie Charles for you! I loved him, and still do, but then you swooped in and convinced me to leave him that time at summer camp. I've always regretted it. And now, you're asking me to abandon my faith in him again, and put it in you, the worst boyfriend in history? I'll gladly die before I let that happen again!"

Joe's face grew stone cold.

"Fine" The villain spat. He charged up some more energy in his palm and formed it into a dagger. The students backed away fearfully as Peggy Jean remained motionless. She knew it was pointless to resist, so she'd just accept her death with dignity. Joe raised the dark dagger into the air and prepared to stab it down into her pretty little face-

"Leave her alone Joe!"

Joe's eyes widened in surprise, causing him to lose focus on the dagger and making it fade away. He saw the students gasp and gape at something behind him, and turned to see Charlie Brown standing by the gates.

Sighs of relief and excited chattering filled the playground as Charlie Brown, followed closely by his fellow Peanuts, entered onto the school grounds. Thibault sneered at the Guardian, Peppermint Patty and Lucy each shook their fists in his direction, shutting him up.

Peggy Jean smiled at this new occurrence, sticking her tongue out at Joe. The bully didn't see this, his eyes were locked firmly onto his enemy. A wicked grin filled out Joe's face as he took a few steps closer to Charlie Brown, hands casually behind his back.

"So, finally decided to show up, eh Brown" Joe said in a falsely pleasant tone.

"Sorry I'm late, Snoopy got into a fight with an orange cat on the way here" Charlie Brown explained.

"And for such a lazy cat, he put up a real nasty fight too" Snoopy groaned, covered from head to foot in bandages. Joe ignored the troublesome beagle and started staring down the Guardian of Light.

Charlie Brown stared back at Joe with a far less confident expression, though he fought hard not to show any obvious fear. Joe took a few casual steps forward, and Charlie Brown cautiously clenched a fist and prepared to channel some light energy in case of an attack.

"So, Charlie" Joe addressed Charlie Brown with only his first name "Word on the street is that you're some sort of super powered hero. Tell me, is that true?"

Charlie Brown remained silent, annoying Joe. The Agate boy channeled some darkness and shot a dark beam at Brown's head, the young Guardian panicked and raised his hands, creating a light shield to block the attack at the last second. The students gasped at this display of supernatural power, Joe grinned eagerly.

"Well Thibault, I owe you one. Seems you were right after all" Joe called to his bullying companion, who raised a fist into the air and cheered victoriously. Joe rolled his eyes at this silliness and turned back to Charlie Brown with a more calculating expression. Charlie Brown returned his gaze with a serious look.

"Joe, listen to me, you don't know what you're getting yourself into" Charlie Brown began, wanting desperately to reason with the bully rather than give him the fight he wanted.

"Oh, is that true?" Joe replied, looking innocently bemused.

"I mean it Joe, The Dark Witch is an evil being. You might think she's giving you power, but she's just using you so she can turn everyone here and everywhere into a heartless shadow. You can't let her control you" Charlie Brown warned. Joe laughed derisively.

"Control me? What, you think I'm not in complete control of my actions?" Joe asked humourously, Charlie Brown tensed up "I want to kill you. I WANT to take control of this school, strike fear into peoples hearts. Since I was a little kid, all I've ever wanted was to be on top, to be in charge. And now I can be! So what if I'm the servant of some Witch. I happen to KNOW she's not lying to me, if she were I'd back out, but I'm not giving up these powers just 'cause you tell me to!" By now Joe's friendly atmosphere had vanished completely, and he was displaying only his real emotions: Anger and hatred for the bald-looking boy in front of him.

"I've had to put up with a lot of humiliation 'cause of you! Do you know what it's like losing to the BIGGEST loser on earth?! It's embarrassing! I've been living in shame for five freaking years! And now I have the chance to end all that. Now I have the power to KILL YOU!" A dark aura flared around Joe's body on the word kill, startling everyone present. Charlie Brown was intimidated, but still hopeful he could get through.

"I understand it must be humiliating, but come on! Find your humanity, I'm sure deep down even you don't want to actually kill me.

That's the darkness talking!" Charlie Brown yelled.

"Well maybe it is" Joe admitted, clenching his fists "But it's what I really want, but haven't had the balls to accept until now. So does it really matter?"

"It matters a lot Joe. Don't you see, you're already becoming a puppet to the darkness. You're already starting to become a heartless!"

That was the last straw for Joe. No longer was he angry. No, now he was a thousand miles beyond the point of blank rage.

"You dare compare ME, the warrior of darkness, to a mindless, stupid heartless!" Joe roared, his dark aura growing larger and larger.

"Charlie Brown, give it up already! He's not gonna be reasoned with, just beat him up!" Lucy yelled from the sidelines. Charlie Brown's other friends all began voicing support for Lucy's opinion, realising that looking for humanity in Joe Agate was a lost cause. Charlie Brown sighed, he knew he would have to agree. While Agate continued to glare him out, Charlie Brown began channeling as much of his own light energy as he could, though he did not create an aura around himself unless it only tempted Joe to strike quicker.

"You know what, I've had it! No more waiting around and making small talk. I say we just hurry up and get to the part where I beat you to a bloody pulp!" Joe shouted, assuming a fighting stance. Charlie Brown assumed his own fighting stance which he hoped wasn't too goofy.

"Sorry Joe, but that's not gonna happen" Charlie Brown said with all the bravery he could muster. Over by the gate, his friends were smiling.

Joe rose into the air and stretched out his arms. The dark barriers he had earlier erected vanished from sight, as the Dark Warrior wished to save all his power for this showdown.

"All of you hide inside the school, get everyone else in there with you. Just stay where it's safe" Charlie Brown instructed his friends. They each nodded in turn and ran across the playground to where the other students were gathered. Peppermint Patty and Violet took the task of ushering everyone but Joe's followers inside. Thibault, Eggman and the others merely chose to hide behind the side of the building where they could still watch the epic battle.

Now the only ones who remained on the battlefield were Charlie Brown, Joe Agate and the still semi-invisible Sparky, who was trying to encourage Charlie Brown.

"Don't be afraid Charlie. I won't lie, the fate of everyone depends on the outcome of this battle, but don't think about that. Instead think about what you're fighting for. Your friends, family, the people you love. Turn your positive thoughts and feelings into power. And most of all, believe in yourself. Just believe in yourself, and you can't go wrong" Sparky said wisely to Charlie Brown, who nodded his head, looking up at the darkness-enshrouded Joe Agate.

"I still don't know if I can do this" Charlie Brown said anxiously, Sparky's ears drooped "But I sure will try" The dog spirit perked up a bit.

Finally having had absolutely enough of stalling, Joe Agate dived down and lunged at Charlie Brown. The Hero of Light blocked Joe's initial strike with a light shield, but the Agate boy began striking the barrier with a barrage of darkness-enhanced punches. The shield soon started to crack and then completely shattered, and Joe landed a hard punch to Charlie Brown's face.

Taking great pleasure in what he just did, Joe aimed another punch for Brown's face. But this time Charlie Brown managed to block the attack, grabbing hold of Joe's fist. The darkness weilder growled and aimed a punch for Charlie Brown's gut with his left hand, but Brown grabbed that too. Joe struggled to free his hands from Charlie Brown's, but the hero refused to let go. So instead Joe made to headbutt him. However, Charlie Brown had the same idea, and the resulting clash left them both with splitting head pains.

Both fighters staggered backwards, clutching their heads in pain. Joe recovered first and struck Charlie Brown with a swift kick to the chest, with enough force to send him flying into the fence around the school. From the window the Peanuts gang watched the battle, and winced at the sight of their friend's pain.

"That was a cheap shot! Foul, foul!" Peppermint Patty was yelling at Joe. But with the window closed he couldn't hear her.

Joe laughed coldly at the downed Charlie Brown. Until he started to get up, at which point he ran at full speed to assault him again. But this time Charlie Brown struck first, hitting Joe dead on with a charged beam of light from his palms. Joe flew half-way towards the school building, but once the beam vanished he managed to steady himself in mid air. Joe flew at Charlie Brown and began throwing a barrage of dark spheres from his hands at the boy. Charlie Brown kneeled down and then jumped higher than he ever had, flying straight over Joe and avoiding the attack.

Joe turned to see Charlie Brown flying above him and charging light energy in his hands. With a scowl Joe began channeling his own darkness. The rivals fired their charged beams of energy at the exact same time, the two attacks collided in mid air and caused an explosion.

Charlie Brown continued to hover in the air, trying to see past the resulting dust cloud to find any trace of Joe. Little did he realise that Joe, with incredible speed, had managed to fly up behind him. Before Charlie Brown even knew what was happening Agate stuck him in the back with a hard kick, sending him tumbling down into the dust cloud and towards the ground. Not exactly graceful or experienced in safe landings, Charlie Brown landed hard on his face.

The Peanuts winced again as Joe hovered down a few feet over Charlie Brown, laughing as he seemed to struggle to get up.

"What's the matter Brown, getting tired already?" Joe taunted. He was disturbed by the smile Charlie Brown gave him. Charlie Brown suddenly shot up and landed a hard punch to Joe's cheek. Charlie threw several more punches before sending Joe flying with a beam of light. This

time he did crash into the side of the building.

"No... just giving you the chance to let your guard down" Charlie Brown replied, surprised but pleased with his cleverness.

"That's actually pretty good strategy" Franklin nodded approvingly.

"Who would have thought he could actually handle himself adequately in a fight?" Freida said, getting excited.

"But how'd he and Agate get all these powers anyway? What the heck's going on here?" Roy was asking from the back of the classroom, where the other students were taking cover behind a barrier of upturned tables.

"It's a long story, we'll tell you when we're through watching the coolness" Shermy replied, watching through the window as Agate got up and shook off the shock. He didn't look happy...

"Come on Joe! Look at yourself, you're getting clobbered by CHARLIE BROWN! Let 'im have it already!" Thibault yelled from the side of the school. He shut his mouth when Joe started staring daggers at him.

"I'm working on it, alright!" Joe growled, turning back to Charlie Brown with a half-amused, half-enraged look "Well Brown, seems I underestimated you slightly. Seems you're not a complete flop of a fighter after all"

"Thanks. I had a really great trainer" Charlie Brown replied. Sparky grinned from the corner of the playground. Charlie Brown's smirk was soon whiped off his face when he saw the murderous glare Joe gave him.

"Course I'm still gonna kill you" The Agate boy said before vanishing from the spot.

Charlie Brown jumped in surprise and began looking around for his foe. Agate reappeared behind him and kicked him in the head, sending Charlie Brown sliding across the ground, scraping his right arm on the gravel all the way. Charlie Brown looked up just in time to see Agate leap into the air and prepare to stomp down on his face. Charlie Brown managed to grab the foot and hold Joe back, but Joe used his free foot to kick Charlie Brown's face anyway. Charlie Brown released his grip as Joe began pummeling him on the ground.

"Man, I can't tell you how long I've wanted to do this" Joe said as he continuously punched Charlie Brown in the face. Not knowing what else to do, Charlie Brown eventually bit down on one of Joe's fists. Joe cried out in pain as he retracted and clutched his bitten hand, Charlie Brown took this opportunity to flash a bright light from his hand into Joe's eyes, temporarily blinding him and allowing Charlie Brown to slip free.

As soon as Joe regained his vision he realised Charlie Brown had escaped him. He looked up, only to see a ball of light smack him in the face. Joe staggered from the attack as Charlie Brown swooped in and punched him in the gut with a light covered fist. Joe gasped and fell on his knees, clutching his aching stomach.

"Can we just end this Joe. I don't really like you, but I don't want to fight you either. You know you only have half the power I do, so even if you are better at fighting I'll still beat you" Charlie Brown said. He then took a moment to ponder over what he'd just said "Am I actually assuming I can win this fight? Wow, didn't know I had any confidence left in me"

"You should save it for later, when you're dead"

Charlie Brown suddenly realised two things. One, Joe was no longer on his knees before him. And two, Joe was now punching him hard in the face. Charlie Brown went flying twenty feet right over the fences, he tried to steady himself and get flying but lack of experience led to him crashing into the ground anyway.

Joe leapt high into the air, did a backflip and landed on top of the gate, glaring down at Charlie Brown like a stain on the pavement.

"I don't know where you learned to fight, or where you suddenly got this newfound confidence from, but let me just make one thing clear: You're not going to beat me! You're a failure, you always have been a failure, and you always will be a failure. It doesn't matter if you're stronger than me, you're still gonna lose because it's your natural calling! So for once in your life stop deluding yourself into thinking you do have a chance to succeed and accept that!" Joe spat. Charlie Brown wiped some blood from his lip and looked up at Joe, grinning.

"This coming from the only person who's ever lost to me?" Charlie Brown quipped in a stroke of genius. Joe roared in frustration and leapt high into the air. Channeling energy into his foot Joe attempted to stomp down on Charlie Brown and crush his ribcage. But Charlie Brown rolled out of the way in the nick of time, Joe's stomp just leaving a huge crater on the ground. Acting fast Charlie Brown shot up, grabbed Joe by the arm and spun him around several times before throwing him back over the fence. Joe recovered in midair, but was struck with a double punch by a flying Charlie Brown. Joe gasped, spitting up a bit of blood, as Charlie Brown launched a dozen light spheres at his evil opponent. The combination of attacks created a dust cloud around the Agate boy, blinding him from view.

Charlie Brown squinted his eyes at the dust cloud. Just as he was thinking he might have gone a little too far with that attack a giant shadowy hand emerged from the cloud and grabbed him. Joe hovered forward from the cloud. His body at first looked bruised and battered, but as he channelled more darkness around his body, his injuries just seemed to magically heal.

"Nice try" Joe spat at his captive. Charlie Brown desperately tried to wriggle his way out, but Joe ordered the dark hand to squeeze him with all it's might. Charlie Brown screamed in agony as the hand began crushing him, his entire body soon wracked with pain. Joe continued to have the hand squeeze the life out of Charlie Brown for the next five minutes, it was looking like Charlie Brown was finished.

"Oh good grief, I think he's almost through" Pigpen gasped, watching from the window as the shadow hand slowly suffocated his friend.

"We've gotta do something, Chuck's gonna die if we don't help him!" Peppermint Patty yelled. She made to march out the door, but was held back by Marcie and Lucy.

"Ok, two things. One, Agate has powers on the scale of a demigod, nothing we could possibly do could injure or halt him. Two, how are we supposed to help when they're floating TWENTY FEET into the air?!" Lucy yelled in Peppermint's face. The tomboy furrowed her brow at the black haired girl.

"Well, we've still gotta try!" Peppermint Patty said defiantly.

"But what on this earth CAN we do?" Franklin wondered. Snoopy hummed thoughtfully.

"Let me have that for a second" Snoopy snatched Linus's blanket out of his hand and ran outside with it. Linus and Sally ran out after him.

"This is not the time for this stupid game Snoopy, give me my blanket back and get under cover" Linus demanded, but the beagle ignored him and began examining some chunks of the school wall that had come loose when Joe crashed into it. After finding a suitably sized piece of rubble the creative pooch used Linus's blanket like a sling and hurled the rock upwards, striking Joe Agate right in the back of the head.

"AUGH!" Joe Groaned in pain, looking back to see what had hit him. This momentary distraction led the shadowy hand to stop squeezing Charlie Brown. Acting quickly and trying to catch his breath at the same time, Charlie Brown finally managed to wriggle free. Joe spotted Snoopy, Linus and Sally on the ground and decided he would deal with them later, turning back to Charlie Brown. He was instantly met with a hard light punch to the face. Joe lost control of his flying and started falling back down to earth, catching himself five feet from the ground and carefully lowering himself so that he was only a few inches off the ground. Charlie Brown lowered himself down to confront Joe once more.

"Thanks Snoopy" Charlie Brown thanked his dog, who grinned appreciatively and bowed "Linus, take Sally and Snoopy back inside now before things get more dangerous"

"On it" Linus nodded, grabbing Sally by the hand and dragging Snoopy back in by the blanket he refused to let go of. Sally was going to wish her brother good luck, but was too busy mentally swooning over the fact Linus was holding her hand.

Joe glanced quickly from the departing trio to Charlie Brown, who was disturbed by the grin on his face. Joe charged dark energy in his hand and shot a beam at Linus, Sally and Snoopy. In a moment of panic and desperation, Charlie Brown dived down and took the blast. The heroic blockhead landed with a hard thud on the floor. His friends stopped to stare back in worry, but he hastily motioned for them to get back inside, which they grudgingly agreed to do. Floating right over the downed hero, Joe Agate laughed maliciously.

"So that's your other weakness then. You can't stand to let your friends get hurt" Joe said, his voice dark and calculating. Charlie

Brown pushed himself back onto his feet, only to see Joe float backwards to the centre of the playground and charge another high powered dark beam. But he wasn't aiming the attack on Charlie Brown, but the school building. More specifically, the classroom where the Peanuts and all the other students were hiding and watching the battle.

"NO"

Realising what was happening, Charlie Brown flew in front of the building. Joe unleashed the full might of his beam at that exact moment, Charlie Brown summoned the biggest light shield he could at a moments notice. Through sheer force of will he managed to keep the shield from shattering right up until the beam faded. However, this left him worn out and vulnerable to a barage of speedy punches from Joe, followed by the bully sending Charlie Brown crashing into the fence by blasting him with a dark sphere.

Joe's cohorts cheered from behind the side of the school, while from the window the Peanuts watched in horror as Charlie Brown lay in agony at the other side of the school yard. Joe stopped to savour his moment of fun, giving Charlie Brown just enough time to rethink his strategy.

'So now he's going to threaten my friends to beat me. I can't risk their lives, I have to do something... hmm... I guess there's only one thing to it. I've got to get Joe away from here. Somehow, I just have to move this fight somewhere else' Charlie Brown thought. Then suddenly he had an idea.

Painfully, Charlie Brown got to his feet and, following instincts previously unknown to him, shot a beam of light at Joe. But this beam didn't just crash into Joe and harm him, but rather it trapped him in a sphere of light, with the beam still flowing from Charlie Brown's hand taking the form of a chain. His guard down due to the belief that victory was assured, Joe did not realise what was happening until the second before he became trapped.

"Hey! What's the meaning of this!" Joe screamed, pounding at the sphetrical prison with dark-covered fists. Shocked at his own handiwork, Charlie Brown seized the opportunity and swung the captured Joe Agate around, releasing his grip on the light chain when he felt he had built up enough momentum and sending the bully flying across the town. Charlie Brown sighed, after a warning look to Thibault, Eggman and the other bullies he flew off after Joe.

As Charlie Brown flew off his friends emerged from the school building to get a better view of his departure.

"What's he up to now?" Lucy wondered aloud.

"I believe he's leading Joe away from you all. A noble action, and imperative for making sure Joe does not use his bonds to you against him" Explained Sparky as he hovered back from the sidelines to rejoin the group. While the Peanuts stared off into the distance at their departing friend, Thibault and the other followers of darkness stepped out from behind the side of the school. Their eyes drifted to where Sparky was floating. Apparently the spirit dog was now visible to all, because the moment they saw him they all gawked and gasped.

"WHAT THE HECK IS THAT THING?" Charlotte Braun asked loudly, bemused like the others. Sparky turned to the evil group, his expression becoming more serious as he floated closer to them. All but Thibault and Eggman backed away, those two being the more knowledgeable about the Universal Guardians and their bizarre appearances.

"So, this is the last Guardian eh?" Thibault began, staring the spirit up. He snorted "No wonder the Dark hag killed him, he looks like a wimp"

"In my living state I was capable of obliterating planets on a whim, but that is of no importance. While Charlie Brown and Joe Agate take their battle to the town, I must speak with you all" Sparky began seriously.

"Oh, let me guess. You're going to tell us all how siding up with the forces of evil is wrong, and we should all do the right thing and go back to a peaceful life, right?" Eggman asked humourously. Sparky shook his head woefully at the oval scientist.

"It would be pointless to try to speak sense to you Ivo, your heart will always belong to the side of evil. But what you say is precisely what I intend to say to the kids" Sparky replied. Thibault laughed loudly.

"And miss out on universal domination, yeah right! F### off, Pluto!" Thibault yelled rudely at the spirit. Sparky shook his head, recognising another lost cause and passed Thibault to address the other Dark Followers, who were all still a bit apprehensive of him.

"Do not fear me young ones. I am Sparky, former Guardian of Light. I will not harm you, I simply wish to persuade you not to align yourselves with Joe and my sister. You are all naturally born into the realm of light, to follow the darkness would mean to surrender your souls. My sister is corrupt and misguided, siding with her will bring you nothing but suffering and eternity as a mindless, heartless beast. And I know you do not want that. I know you are frightened by Joe's power, but Charlie Brown will prevail. You will all be protected, everyone in this Realm is under our protection. So please, don't go down the path of darkness. Come back over to the light, where you will be safe" Sparky said gently, holding his ghostly hand out to the kids.

Some of the teens, particularly Tapioca Pudding and Crybaby Boobie, looked at the spirit's hand with an almost longing expression. Others, like Freddie Fabulous, looked to the hand, then looked Sparky right in the eye and scoffed.

"Like I told Joe earlier, I want power. And something tells me I ain't gonna get that power listening to you. So, as Thibault wisely put it, f### off Pluto!" The sports star scoffed. A look of worry flashed across Sparky's face. He tried to reason with Freddie, but...

"Yeah, we all CHOSE to be on the side of evil. Sure, maybe it's not a wise choice, but come on. If Charlie Brown's our only opposition, then the universe is practically in Joe's hands already" Melody said arrogantly.

"Yeah, it would be stupid to quit now. Charlie Brown's gonna die, and that's a fact" Molly pointed out. Tapioca and Crybaby looked at Molly, and deciding she had to be right they sunk back behind the rest of the group so as not to catch Sparky's eye.

"Please, children, I know to you it seems hopeless that-" But Sparky was caught off again by Bad-Call Benny.

"We chose to work for Joe, and that's how it's gonna be. We're gonna rule the universe, and there's nothing you or ol' blockhead extrordinnaire Charlie Brown can do about it!" Benny yelled confidently. Sparky's face faltered, panic overcoming him.

"You don't know what you're doing! You think this is a game, do you think it's all just as simple as "Joe beats Charlie Brown and we rule all". It's not going to be like that. If my sister has her way she'll plunge everything into darkness. Your families, friends, and everyone in the entire universe will be stripped of their minds and their free will, turned into shadow puppets, slaves! And you will not be spared that fate just for agreeing to go along with her plans. Please, I beg of you. End it now, return to the side of the light or face the most cruel of fates"

That... actually seemed to get through to the kids, who looked nervously between themselves.

"He's bluffing, of course" Thibault said nonchalantly, but Jose Peterson scratched his head impishly.

"I don't know... he sounds pretty serious" Jose said nervously, earning a cautioning glare from the short villain.

"I certainly don't want to spend my life as a slave, or a shadow puppet" Lydia added thoughtfully "Maybe this isn't such a good idea..."

Thibault stared between the rest of his new team, each one looking increasingly doubtful about their decision to join Joe Agate's cause. None of them much liked the thought of spending eternity in darkness, and even Freddie Fabulous was having doubts whether unimaginable power was worth the loss of his free will. Thibault growled at their weakness, and realising he had to act fast to avoid a scolding from Joe and that ugly old witch he scoffed loudly to get everyone's attention.

"Oh come on, you can't believe what this chump's saying. I mean, sure, The Witch may be evil and Joe and I bullies, but we're true to our word. Joe offered you salvation, and that's what we'll give you. Everyone else here might be turned into a heartless, but we won't be. And if you don't believe me, then consider your other option: Rely on CHARLIE BROWN to pull through and save you! If you abandon our enterouge now you'll only be condemning yourselves to a gruesome death once Joe's done thrashing Brown about, sticking with us is your only hope" Thibault said craftily. There was a collective hum among the dark group.

"... hmm... that's probably true" Tapioca admitted sadly.

"When you put it like that it doesn't leave you with much option,

does it?" Bad Call supplied, earning a few nods and mumbled agreements from his cohorts.

"Now hold on" Sparky interrupted "What makes you all so certain Charlie Brown will be defeated? Can any of you honestly predict the future, because otherwise none of you can honestly say Charlie Brown cannot win this battle"

"Um, dude, it's Charlie Brown, duh" Thibault put plainly, to the agreement of the others. Sparky prepared to argue, but stopped himself.

"Oh, very well" The canine spirit sighed, turning away from the group of no-goods and beginning to float back towards the Peanuts gang "I see I'm not going to get anywhere while you're all still in doubt. I'll just see how you all feel once Charlie Brown has bested Joe, I'm sure you'll listen to reason then"

Thibault groaned "For the last time, Charlie Brown is gonna lose! He's the biggest blockhead on the face of the universe, the only thing he ever succeeds at is making a fool of himself! Give me one good reason why you'd think he could beat Joe!"

Sparky smirked.

"Because it is his destiny" The spirit said vaguely, leaving Thibault and the other dark followers confused and in wonder as he rejoined the Peanuts gang and the other students.

"Don't worry Sparky, I'm sure they'll come around once this is all over" Linus said encouragingly to the spirit elder, noticing the downtrodden look on his face.

"I'm counting on it, but for now we have more pressing matters to contend with. Specifically the safety of your fellow students" Sparky said importantly "While Charlie Brown and Joe Agate are gone it would be wise to relocate the other youngsters to a more secure area outside of town. Ideally we should try a town-wide evacuation, but for the moment we should just focus on saving whoever we can. Do any of you know of a safe location we can lead the students?"

The gang thought long and hard about this. Given the scale of Charlie Brown and Joe's powers, and the carnage that would inevitably result from their fighting, it was hard to think of anywhere that was truly "Safe". And where in Birchwood or around the area could they go that Joe couldn't find them? Pigpen suggested maybe they could hide out in the woods, but Sally debunked that by reminding him that Joe could simply tear all the trees down to find them quickly. Violet offered to let them all hide out in the basement of her family's mansion, but the Peanuts all agreed that might be too predictable.

"Well, there's got to be someplace safe we can go" Schroeder said desperately. Marcie hummed thoughtfully before offering her suggestion.

"Franklin, your grandfather has a bomb shelter beneath his house, right?" Marcie asked her baseball teammate, who nodded yes, catching on.

"The entrance is reinforced steel, it requires a password to open it

that only my grandfather knows... and he rarely leaves the house, so of course he'll be there to open it for us" Franklin replied.

"And is there room enough for all of us?" Marcie asked. Franklin looked between his friends and then to the massive crowd of students staring expectantly at him. The african american boy frowned awkwardly.

"Well, it would be a VERY tight squeeze... but maybe. My Grampa does know how to maximise space" Franklin said thoughtfully.

"Hate to put a dampener on things, but how is a bomb shelter going to protect us from someone as powerful as Agate?" Violet asked pointedly.

"Well it would be safer than here, and Joe may not suspect it as a hiding place. It's not like we have any better options anyway" Marcie reasoned. Everyone agreed that sounded right.

"Well, it's better than standing around here like sitting ducks" Patty nodded "Lead the way Franklin"

With the plan set Franklin and Linus began ushering the students towards the now easily accessible gateway. However, as the Peanuts were about to leave Dr Eggman suddenly appeared to block their path.

"Apoligies, my dear children, but I'm afraid I can't let you leave. Earlier on Joe asked that I ensure the student body stay put and it would be unwise for me not to follow his orders" The doctor explained, pulling out a lazer gun and aiming it for Linus's head "So everybody get back against the school building and don't move another muscle"

The terrified students all gulped and put their hands in the air, as did most of the Peanuts gang. Sally however was too busy staring at the lazer weapon in wide eyes wonder to worry.

"Is that a real lazer gun?" The second youngest of the Peanuts gang asked. Eggman, looking pleased to have someone show interest in one of his inventions, twirled the lazer around in a show-offy fashion.

"Sure is. Powered by the hyper-go-on energy I managed to save from my plan to capture the alien race known as the Wisps, it has the potential to obliterate substances harder than diamond" Eggman bragged, then remembering he was trying to appear imposing he pointed it again at Peppermint Patty's head, as she was standing at the front of the group "So if you all know what's good for you you'll all stay put"

While the students were all too afraid to argue, Sparky simply smiled and floated forward as though Eggman wasn't there. The villainous scientist aimed the gun for him, but Sparky was just calmly ushering the Peanuts to follow him.

"Come along children, he's no threat" Sparky said encouragingly. The villain took great offense to that.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'M NO THREAT!? I'm the greatest scientist the

universe has ever known!" Eggman roared. Sparky nodded.

"Your intelligence is to be admired Ivo, but I know your threat to incinerate these students with that lazer is only a bluff. We both know that, for all your craziness and evil plots, you would never dare to directly kill anyone. And considering you're vastly outnumbered, it's unlikely you'll try to stop us physically" Sparky explained smartly. Eggman lowered his weapon and his face fell slightly, knowing that to be true. Thibault, on the other hand, did not share his views.

"Well then it's lucky I'm not that pathetic" Thibault said as he walked up to Eggman and snatched the lazer gun out of his hands, aiming it for Peppermint Patty's face "So long, Blockheads!"

The Peanuts gasped and leapt out of the way as Thibault fired an enormous lazer from the gun. Peppermint Patty's eyes widened and she managed to duck, the lazer crashing into the school doors and disintegrating them. The tomboy looked back at the destroyed doors and glared at Thibault.

"What are you crazy?! YOU COULD HAVE KILLED ME!" Peppermint Patty screamed in fury.

"That's the idea" Thibault said plainly, firing another blast at the mousy haired girl.

Peppermint Patty dodged to the right, Thibault was about to fire another lazer at her when Linus used his blanket to knock it out of his hands, as the gun slides several feet away.

"Hey!" Thibault yelled at the blanket carrier. He ran to retrieve the futuristic gun, but was quickly tackled to the floor by Peppermint Patty as she began punching him in the face.

Nearby, Freddie Fabulous and the other Dark Followers watched, slightly embarrassed, as Peppermint Patty pounded Thibault. Fabulous looked to the lazer, a grin spreading up his face he reached down to pick up the dangerous superweapon.

"Well, I was hoping Joe would give me super strength or something, but a disintegration ray sounds pretty cool too" Freddie commented as he examined the weapon in his hands, a hungry look on his face as he imagined the countless things he could do with weapon. Any villainous plans he might have had though were quickly brushed aside as Linus threw out his blanket and used it to snatch the gun out of his hands.

"This thing's far too dangerous to be allowed to remain workable" Linus commented, holding the lazer with a look of disdain "It would be best if we were to destroy it, but I don't know how we would..."

"Simple" Lucy said, snatching the gun from her brother and snapping it in half against her extended knee. A colourful energy seeped through the broken ends of the snapped lazer before vanishing "There, problem solved"

"You know, we could have used that to defend ourselves if Joe attacked us again" Violet pointed out irritably. Linus and Lucy

exchanged looks and both shrugged innocently at their friends. Linus was about to provide one of his witty comebacks, but was knocked to the ground by a flying kick to the back of his head by Freddie Fabulous, who stomped down on his back and held him down.

"Hey, geek, nobody steals from me and gets away with it!" Freddie yelled, raising a fist and preparing to strike Linus, only to receive a sharp smack in the face from Linus's blanket. Linus pushed the football star off him as he began whipping him back with the blue cloth.

Lucy sighed in annoyance at the sight of her brother fighting back Fabulous, more so because he was providing a practical use for that blanket which she hated so much. Over with the other Dark Followers, Molly Volley called out to Lucy.

"Man, I guess being a freak must run in your family, huh Pelt?!" Molly yelled snidely. Lucy glared at her, clenching her fists.

"You wanna rumble, fat legs!?" Lucy called out threateningly. Molly pounded her fists together and grinned with cruel pleasure.

"Bring it on, crab-face" Molly challenged. With a terrifying war cry, Lucy charged forward and tackled Molly Volley to the floor, the crabby rivals punching and scratching at one another on the ground.

Floating above this scene, Sparky watched with disbelief as Molly and Lucy fought on the floor. He looked to Peppermint Patty pummeling Thibault aswell, and then to Linus fending off Freddie Fabulous. The canine spirit sighed.

"Yeah, I can see where this is going" Sparky commented wearily.

* * *

><p>(Meanwhile, across town)<p>

Charlie Brown flew above the town buildings, following the light sphere containing the trapped Joe Agate. He was flying slow, choosing to put as much energy into healing himself as possible. He remembered what Sparky had told him about his healing capacity last night, and how his "Inner light" Would automatically begin healing his wounds whenever he was injured, but that there were limits to how much he could heal over a given period of time. Noticing that his injuries seemed to be healing slower than earlier on in the battle, Charlie Brown could only assume that he was getting closer to his limit. Which also meant he would soon be infinitely more vulnerable to the full extent of Joe's attacks. The only thing keeping Charlie Brown from panicking was the hope that Joe might soon be reaching his own limits aswell. Either way, Charlie Brown knew he had to end this fight as soon as possible.

Inside the sphetrical light prison, Joe was pounding furiously against the walls with his darkness covered fists. Realising the slow progress with which the prison was breaking Joe changed his tactics to blasting the inside of the sphere with dark lightning. With an ENORMOUS surge of dark electricity, Joe shattered the sphere and flew upwards. Joe observed his surroundings, noticing that Charlie Brown had managed to throw him all the way to the park. A few seconds

passed and Charlie Brown flew in a few feet away from Joe.

"How did you master such a complicated technique so fast?!" Joe furiously demanded. Charlie Brown shrugged meekly.

"Honestly, I don't know. The idea just popped into my head, and when I fired the beam... it just happened" Charlie Brown responded, taking a moment to ponder his uncharacteristic skillfulness. Joe snorted, feeling both grumpy and, though he'd die before he'd admit it, a bit jealous.

"Doesn't matter, the same stupid trick won't work on me twice. Now DIE!" Joe shot several dark lightning bolts from his fingertips at Charlie Brown, who hurriedly erected a shield of light in front of himself. However, he was only able to sustain this shield for ten seconds before it shattered, allowing the lightning to strike him dead on. Charlie Brown screamed in agony as the evil electricity ravaged his body. Luckily for him Joe was only able to carry on this assault for a few seconds before the lightning faded. Charlie Brown gasped for breath and floated down onto the floor on his knees.

Joe floated down, watching with sadistic glee as Charlie Brown panted on the ground. To add to his enemy's misery Joe struck him with another blast of black lightning. Charlie Brown sensed this attack and rolled out of the way, but Joe merely moved his hands after him and redirected the lightning, which made a direct hit on the near-bald hero. Charlie Brown writhed in pain as Joe tortured him with lightning for thirty seconds. Thirty long, grueling seconds. When this second assault was over Charlie Brown's entire body was quaking, and Joe was laughing.

"Bet you wish you could shoot lightning, dont'cha Brown?" Joe asked smugly. Charlie Brown lifted his head weakly. Despite his pain he managed a grin, Joe's taunt had just given him a great idea.

"I... I may not be able to sh-shoot lightning J-oe..." Charlie Brown panted, surrounding himself with healing light, putting Joe on alert "But... there is something else I can do that you can't"

Joe wondered for a moment what Charlie Brown meant, but decided to shrug it off and prepared another barrage of lightning. Charlie Brown, healed enough so that he could move normally, stood up quickly and prepared his own attack. Joe unleashed his dark lightning upon the heroic blockhead. But what happened next came as a horrifying surprise to the bully. Right as the lightning was about to strike Charlie Brown, the hero summoned a strange, flaring light into his hands and pushed it forward. Right before Joe's eyes, the light became a turrent of blazing, golden flames! The fire of light clashed with Joe's dark lightning, engulfing it as the flames made their way towards the dark warrior.

Joe's eyes widened in genuine terror as the flames rocketed towards him, his own attack failing to hold it back. Without a second to spare Joe ceased his lightning and flew swiftly to the left. Though he managed to avoid being barbequed Joe's feet were still caught in the fire. With a wince Joe began quickly healing them (And somehow repairing his shoes in the process).

Shocked by what he had just endured, Joe turned, panting, to the nearly fully healed Charlie Brown, who was again amazed by his own

ability.

"Wow, that's the first time I made more than a small flame" Charlie Brown said cheerfully. Joe frowned incredulously at him.

"What the hell was that! How'd you manage to shoot fire like that?!" Joe asked.

"Well, that was the last thing Sparky told me last night before I went to bed. He told me about how you can shoot lightning, and that it was unique to his sister, and now you too it seems. And he said that as Guardian of Light I have my own unique elemental power: Fire. And as he puts it, fire beats lightning anytime" Charlie Brown said proudly. Then he groaned and stuck his hands near his mouth, blowing on them to cool them down "Course, my powers don't also provide immunity to heat. Ow"

Joe growled furiously at Charlie Brown, who was desperately trying to cool his hands down. Charging up darkness in his palms Joe flew straight for the hero, Charlie Brown realised what was happening just in time to block Joe's punch with one of his own. Joe aimed several more dark punches at Brown's head, but Charlie Brown managed to either block or dodge them all. Charlie Brown made to kick Joe in the gut, only to have Joe grab his foot and throw him backwards. Joe aimed a dark sphere at the flying Charlie Brown, who managed to steady himself and barrel roll out of the way before launching his own light sphere at Joe. The flying bully blocked the blast with a dark shield. He then dispersed the shield and flew at Charlie Brown again, the two combatants getting into a lock up in the air.

Finally Joe managed to land a punch to Charlie Brown, and a hard one at that. As Charlie Brown recoiled in pain he was left vulnerable to a dark beam in the chest. The concentrated blast of dark energy sent Brown flying into a tree.

Charlie Brown recoiled on the ground, he saw Joe flying towards him with an enormous amount of dark energy surrounding his hand. Charlie Brown watched on in horror as Joe morphed that dark energy into the form of a long dark sword. With a terrified jolt, Charlie Brown shot up and avoided the attack, Joe's dark sword merely slicing the tree in half. Joe looked up and reconfigured the dark sword into a sphere, firing it at Charlie Brown, who dodged.

Charlie Brown realised he would have to start putting more effort into fighting back, so far he was mostly dodging and blocking Joe's attacks, and Joe was still easily landing more hits. And he still wasn't showing any obvious sign of reaching his healing limits (Though Charlie Brown had no idea what signs he would possibly show of that). With that in mind Charlie Brown flew towards Joe. The bully placed a hand behind his back, charging up dark energy and waiting for the right moment to attack. When Charlie Brown was mere seconds away from reaching him Joe threw out his arm and fired the beam. But Charlie Brown wasn't that stupid. He'd predicted that exact outcome and fired his own light beam downwards, propelling himself upwards and out of the path of Joe's attack.

Joe prepared a second beam, but Charlie Brown shot down from the air and kicked him dead straight in the jaw with a light kick, sending him crashing into a duck pond and knocking a few of his teeth loose.

After a few seconds Joe's head popped out of the water. Ignoring the frantically flapping ducks surrounding him Joe flew out of the pond, only to be met with a hard light sphere to the gut. While Joe was stunned Charlie Brown flew forward and delivered several hard punches to his face and gut, finishing his assault with a powerful kick that sent Joe flying straight into the branches of the Kite-Eating Tree.

Coughing up a few leaves, Joe looked over to Charlie Brown and shook his fist.

"Not bad Brown, but it'll take more than that to beat-"

But Joe was interrupted by an odd rustling sound. A confused look spreading over his face, Joe looked around and saw that the leaves of the tree seemed to be moving. Before he could figure out what was happening a giant mouth began to form around him. Joe panicked and attempted to flee, but was unable to avoid being swallowed up by the tree.

Hovering over, Charlie Brown watched in shock as the Kite-Eating Tree munched away at his enemy. He wasn't sure whether he should be thankful for the Tree's assistance, or disgusted by what he was seeing. Charlie Brown watched the tree munch away for the next ten seconds, but then it suddenly stopped. Charlie Brown raised an eyebrow, wondering if the tree was finished, or if it had realised Joe wasn't a kite. The leaves began to shake, and the next thing you know they were all blown off by a pulse of dark energy.

Joe Agate floated to the ground, gasping and looking traumatised by his absurd experience. Charlie Brown looked between him and the now leaveless Kite-Eating Tree, frowning slightly.

"Well that wasn't very nice, how's the tree supposed to eat now?" Charlie Brown scolded. Joe glared viciously at him.

"I'm a little more concerned about the fact that I nearly just got EATEN by a TREE!" Joe roared. He kneeled down and shot up in the air after Charlie Brown, grabbing him by the head and spinning him around. Joe released his grip and sent Charlie Brown flying out of the park and into the town.

Charlie Brown managed to steady himself, but was then struck in the face by a dark beam. Charlie Brown landed on the roof of the town library, Joe hopped onto another building near Brown.

"Give up yet, Blockhead?" Joe asked cockily. Charlie Brown gritted his teeth and shook his head at the bully.

"I can't give up, there's too much at stake!" Charlie Brown yelled back.

"Oh right, I forgot. Your precious friends" Joe laughed coldly "Why are you bothering trying to defend that stinking Peanuts gallery of yours? None of those so called friends of yours actually like you, the only reason any of them associate with you is because they feel sorry for you"

"That's not true!" Charlie Brown yelled defiantly, but Joe shook his

head disaprovingly.

"Oh please" Joe snorted "You're the most depressing person to be with in this whole town, all you ever do is complain about how nothing ever goes right for you and that no-one likes you. Tell me, would you want to be friends with someone like that? Even your sister admits you're a loser!"

Charlie Brown took a deep breath and glared at Joe.

"I don't care what you say, I know you're lying" Charlie Brown said, ignoring his own building feelings of doubt "And even if what you're saying was true, I'd still defend them. And all the other students too. If I let you beat me, everyone in the universe is going to suffer for it"

Joe chuckled "Aww, how noble"

"Seriously Joe, don't you realise what you're doing. If you help the Dark Witch take over she's going to turn everyone in the universe into heartless. I know you hate me beyond all reason, but you can't say you actually want all those people to suffer!" Charlie Brown tried again to reason with the bully. But Joe just shrugged it off.

"Why should I care about anyone elses fate? As long as I get what I want, I don't give a crap about the rest of the universe" Joe said honestly. Charlie Brown glared at him in disgust.

"You can't be serious" Charlie Brown growled.

"Do I look like I'm not?" Joe asked while giving Charlie Brown a foul look. The sworn enemies stared each other down some more before Joe snapped "Enough talk, more fight"

And Joe summoned another dark sphere to his hand and threw it at Brown. Charlie Brown shot into the air, the blast just leaving a hole in the library roof. Joe flew at Charlie Brown with a dark fist, but Charlie Brown ducked down and grabbed Joe's arm. Charlie Brown kneed Joe in the stomach and threw him towards the curb. Joe landed on his feet and shot himself up at Brown again, landing a flying punch to his stomach and sending him flying back. Charlie Brown managed to steady himself, but was sent flying through two building by a dark kick from Joe.

Charlie Brown landed with a thud in front of the convenience store. He was battered, bruised and even bleeding in parts. And worst of all, he could barely feel the effects of his healing power any more. The pain was worse than ever now. Charlie Brown shuddered at the thought of it. Whatever happened, he knew this fight couldn't last much longer.

"Ready to die Brown?!"

Charlie Brown looked up to see Joe charging a shadow beam ten feet above him. Charlie Brown jumped to dodge the beam, but the shockwave caused by it's impact sent him flying twenty feet forward. Fortunately landing on his feet, Charlie Brown flipped around to see Joe rocketing towards him again.

* * *

><p>In the Fifth grade classroom of Birchwood Middle school, we find Rerun and his class gathered around a television replaying the broadcast Joe and Eggman had earlier sent out. Their teacher had left to go to the bathroom a minute ago, and a few of the students decided to watch cartoons on the classes tv set (Which was supposed to be used only for the purpose of watching educational videos, of course) despite the warning of Rerun's friend Amy, better known as the Little Pigtailed girl. While some of the kids, particularly Rerun, took the threats very seriously, some were unconvinced, particularly Larry the minister's son.<p>

"I've heard of prank calls, but never a prank broadcast" Larry commented after the first viewing of Joe's message.

"This isn't a prank Larry, it's true. Charlie Brown is a Guardian, and he's got all these really cool powers over light!" Rerun explained, unable to contain his own excitement over the mere thought of it. Larry just shook his head.

"Yeah, I don't know much about Charlie Brown, but I know he's no Great Gatsby. There's no such thing as a guy who has powers over light or darkness" Larry said plainly.

"It's true! It's true I say!" Rerun declared. Milo, the african american manager of the Goose Eggs baseball team, placed a hand on Rerun's shoulder and tried to calm him down.

"Rerun look, I respect Charles an awful lot, but I know he's not a superhero" Milo said reasonably. Rerun shook his head.

"Charlie Brown IS a Guardian, and he's gonna go fight Joe right now and save us all!" Rerun said confidently. Larry rolled his eyes.

"I'll believe it when I see it"

CRASH

The kids jumped as Charlie Brown crashed through the roof and into the wall, leaving a large crater where he landed. Joe jumped into the room and landed safely on a desk where everyone could see him.

"You're finished!" Joe yelled, leaping towards Brown with his fists charged with darkness. But Charlie Brown shot up and blasted Joe with a powerful light beam, sending him through the wall into the next class.

Charlie Brown panted as he struggled to recover from his various injuries. The students merely stared at him in silent shock. Then after a moment they all burst out in applause and fanboy/girlish glee.

"Nice shot Charlie Brown, I see you're whooping that jerk's butt good!" Rerun cheered for his heroic friend. Charlie Brown smiled appreciatively at him, not having the heart to say he was probably losing.

"Thanks Rerun" Charlie replied, enjoying the admiration he was suddenly receiving from all the youngsters in the room.

"Cheap shot, Brown" Charlie Brown saw Joe crawl back into the room through the hole in the wall. Charlie Brown assumed a fighting stance, keeping his guard up. Joe flew towards Charlie Brown, aiming a punch for his face. While the fifth graders watched in awe, Charlie Brown blocked the punch, placed his free hand over Joe's chest and unleashed a light beam from it, sending Joe flying back out through the roof.

"Rerun, go tell the principal to evacuate the school. Just get everyone to where it's safe" Charlie Brown instructed the youngest Van Pelt, who replied with a salute and an "Aye aye" as Charlie Brown took off after Joe. While the other students simply watched on in amazement Rerun turned smugly to Larry.

"Well?" Rerun said expectantly. Larry sighed.

"I'm sorry I doubted you" Larry replied. Rerun grinned victoriously.

Up in the sky Joe and Charlie Brown were once again locked in aerial combat. Realising a dead on approach wasn't doing him much good Charlie Brown was now resorting to fighting from a distance; I.E firing as many beams and spheres of light at Joe as possible. Joe countered each of the attacks with his own dark attacks, causing a number of explosions as the blasts collided.

_ 'The people watching on the streets must be thinking the world's coming to an end' _ Charlie Brown though, blocking a dark beam from Joe with one of his shields and throwing a light ball at the bully. Joe swerved to avoid it and shot another hand beam at Charlie Brown, who flipped over it. After a few more clashes it was becoming clear that this fighting style wasn't getting Charlie Brown anywhere either.

"Come on Brown, this has gone on long enough! Look at you, you're exhausted. You know you can't keep this up, so why not just give up already!?" Joe asked irritably. Charlie Brown panted a bit before responding.

"I already told you, I won't give up no matter what!" Charlie Brown shot back. After a bit more panting he asked "Why? You're not getting worn out, are you?"

"Me? HA! Get real!" Joe insisted. But Charlie Brown recognised the strain in his voice. And he could see the bruises on Joe's face, the various cuts and bumps along his arms and legs. Though he was refusing to admit it, it was finally clear that Joe too was starting to feel the strain of the battle. This thought filled Charlie Brown with relief, as it ensured him that he wasn't as outmatched as he had long been fearing.

Ignoring the obvious pain he was feeling, Joe lunged once more in the direction of Charlie Brown. With renewed faith, Charlie Brown lunged forward aswell. The super powered rivals got into another lock up, aimlessly flying around as they exchanged punch after punch. Joe managed to land a double punch to Charlie Brown's gut, but Charlie Brown grabbed him by the head and struck Joe with a headbutt. The

resulting clash caused both combatants to fall to the ground, landing at least fifteen feet away from each other as they both collapsed in pain.

Charlie Brown gasped for breath, forcing as much healing energy as he could around his body. He was now REALLY starting to feel the pain, and the glowing light around his body was doing very little to ease it now. God, Charlie Brown really hoped this was over soon.

After forcing his head to lift up, Charlie Brown surveyed his surroundings. He quickly realised he was back on the grounds of his school.

"Good grief, this is just the place I was trying to avoid" Charlie Brown groaned to himself. The sound of punching and rage-filled screams caught his attention, and he turned to see... something very unexpected.

By the looks of it the entire Peanuts gang (Sans Rerun for obvious reasons) were engaged in a battle with Joe's dark followers. Violet was pinning Melody Melody to the ground and pulling her hair, Linus was fending off Freddie Fabulous with his blanket fashioned into a whip, Bad-Call Bennie, Jose Peterson, Charlotte Braun, Joe Richkid and Lydia were all knocked out while Schroeder, Freida, Sally, Franklin and Pigpen sat panting near them, all bruised and battered, Peppermint Patty was beating the snot out of Thibault and Lucy and Molly Volley were engaged in a vicious cat fight.

Charlie Brown blinked at the sight of his friends fighting and weakly stumbled over to Linus.

"Um, Linus, what on earth is going on here?" Charlie Brown asked uncertainly.

"Oh, Charlie Brown, glad you're back" Linus replied, knocking Freddie Fabulous off his feet with his blanket "Well, Thibault made Peppermint Patty mad when he tried insinuating her head with a lazer beam, so she started pounding him. Then Freddie Fabulous attacked me because I took the lazer from him aswell. Lucy and Molly Volley got into a fight after Molly said something insulting to Lucy. And one thing led to another and we all got into a brawl with Joe's enterouge. One which we're actually winning, surprisingly" Linus commented as, nearby, Lucy got up and threw Molly Volley into the wall of the school and kicked her in the face.

"That's for last night, bitch!" Lucy yelled at the downed Molly.

Charlie Brown couldn't quite believe what he was seeing here. Nearby, Joe got back onto his feet and witnessed the battle for himself. With an annoyed frown Joe cleared his throat and yelled "Excuse me!"

At once the Peanuts and Dark Followers ceased fighting. Joe gave his followers the evil eye, and they all winced as they rejoined him, dragging the unconcious members along with them.

"Sorry you had to see that Joe, things got kinda out of hand here" Thibault said awkwardly, his face bruised, nose bleeding and eyes both black.

"Never mind. But next time, if you're gonna get into a fight with Charlie Brown's friends, the least you could do is win" Joe scolded. He ordered his team to hide back behind the school. Nearby, Eggman was laid down on a lawnchair, dressed in red hawaiian shorts and trying to catch a tan. He lifted his head to see Thibault and the other misfits depart back to their old hiding place.

"Ah, I see the halftime show's over. Back to the main event" Eggman commented. He got up and pulled his usual uniform on, packing up the lawnchair and running off to rejoin the other villains.

Joe glared after his followers, panting slightly, then turned furiously on Charlie Brown, who was making sure his friends were alright.

"Well I'm glad nobody got too hurt, but Sally, I don't want you fighting people again" Charlie Brown instructed his little sister, who folded her arms.

"What, Lydia deserved what she got" Sally said definatly. Charlie Brown sighed and shook his head. Realising he was being watched, Charlie Brown turned to face a volatile Joe.

"Haven't forgotten about our fight, have you?" Joe asked. With a nervous glance at his friends Charlie Brown assumed a fighting stance.

"Get out of here, now" Charlie Brown whispered to the gang. Lucy took offense to his tone.

"Don't talk to us like that, ask us nicely"

"LUCY" Charlie Brown yelled. Lucy jumped at the uncharacteristic authority her friend was showing and nodded, as she and the other Peanuts ran to where the other students were gathered near the gate. Watching them run, Joe fired a dark beam at the Peanuts, but Charlie Brown jumped in the way and blocked the attack with a light shield. Charlie Brown lowered the light shield, only to have Joe fly at him and tackle the hero through the wall of the school, into the science lab.

Charlie Brown landed on his usual desk in the science lab. Joe stood above him, ready to strike him with a dark punch. Charlie Brown grabbed Joe's hand as he was about to attack and twisted it as hard as he could, leaving Joe to gasp in pain. With Joe briefly distracted Charlie Brown took the chance to kick him in the stomach and throw him off. While Joe recovered Charlie Brown backflipped across a few desks and prepared a light beam. Joe saw this and prepared to counter with his own dark beam. The beams collided, and the result was the typical explosion. Joe was sent flying backwards through a wall and Charlie Brown into a cabinet full of unlabelled chemicals and solutions.

By Charlie Brown's luck, the spilled chemicals combined and caused another explosion that sent Charlie Brown flying into the same room as Joe, the French class. Shaking off the effects of the blast, Charlie Brown looked up to see Joe preparing to slam the teachers desk down upon him. Charlie Brown rolled out of the way at the last second, the desk shattering to pieces and sending chunks of wood flying everywhere.

Charlie Brown got into a crouching position and leapt at Joe, punching him in the face and into the chalkboard. Joe coughed up a bit of blood and commanded the room's shadows to surround Charlie Brown, who panicked at the sight of it and leapt up onto a desk. The shadows surrounded the desk, which began to sink as though it were in quicksand. Charlie Brown flew off the desk, but was struck with a dark sphere from Joe, causing him to fall to the ground. The shadows on the ground took this chance to surround the Guardian. Charlie Brown tried getting to his feet, but a hand reached out of the shadows and grabbed his leg, pulling him over.

Charlie Brown screamed and struggled, but all his efforts appeared futile as the shadows slowly began to engulf him. With a feeling of dread Charlie Brown closed his eyes, fearing this was the end.

But then all of a sudden... it just stopped.

Feeling a sudden warm sensation throughout his body, Charlie Brown opened his eyes to find he was surrounded by an aura of light, and the shadows seemed to be fading away.

Getting up, Charlie Brown looked over to Joe to find that the bully was just as shocked as he was. After muttering a few choice swear words, a look of understanding washed over the villain's face as he realised what happened.

"I must admit, I hadn't intended to send you to the Realm of Darkness until after I'd beaten you to near-death, but your reasonable fighting skills pushed my hand there. I'm not all that adept at sending people between dimensional barriers yet, not the thing I was really focusing on in my training, I barely even got Thibault and Eggman back here by myself. And considering your heart's so full of light, the shadows don't want to accept you. At least while you're still conscious. And that can easily be remedied" Joe said, summoning more dark energy to his palm.

Knowing what was coming, Charlie Brown channelled light into his hand. Joe fired his dark beam at Charlie Brown, who barrel rolled out of the way and shot his own charged beam at the villain, who was blasted through two walls into the cafeteria.

Joe crashed into the wall in the cafeteria, ironically right next to the double doors. The bully shook off the blast and saw Charlie Brown fly in through the hole Joe had made, the bully gritted his teeth and fired a blast of dark lightning at his foe. With a gulp, Charlie Brown ducked down to avoid the lightning, moving a little too fast he crashed face-first into the floor. Charlie Brown lifted his head and saw Joe preparing another lightning strike, acting fast he leapt behind a table and upturned it, allowing it to take the attack.

Knowing Joe would probably try attacking with another round of dark lightning, Charlie Brown decided to counter attack with some of his own light fire. Joe charged black lightning in his hands and unleashed the full might of his attack on Charlie Brown, who simultaneously launched a roaring firestorm at him... or at least, that's what he meant it to happen. The actual result was that the stream of light fire Charlie Brown shot was underwhelmingly small. It was enough to slow down the lightning bolts, but the enormous bolts

easily overpowered the puny flames. Feeling his heart skip a beat, Charlie Brown abandoned the attack and urgently jumped behind another table, a mere split second before the lightning would have struck him.

"Running out of steam Brown?" Joe asked mockingly, a malicious grin on his face as more dark bolts sparked in his hand.

Charlie Brown gulped, quickly upturning another table to avoid Joe's lightning.

'What was that? Good grief, either I really am running out of energy... or more likely that huge fire earlier was a complete fluke' Charlie Brown thought dejectedly _'Rats, now what am I going to do?'_

Worried that his light beams or spheres would fare no better than his shield against Joe's dark lightning, Charlie Brown had no choice but to continuously dodge Joe's attacks, upturning as many tables as possible as he tried to get close enough to Joe to land an attack. But whenever Charlie Brown managed to get within ten feet of the bully he was forced to leap back or be shocked. Quickly running out of tables, Charlie Brown was soon forced to rely on his super human acrobatics to avoid Joe's strikes. His healing power almost completely void now, Charlie Brown was now struggling to perform these menuvers.

"Would you just stand still and die already!" Joe screamed. He fired another round of lightning at Charlie Brown, who hid behind the last available table. The Agate boy snarled and attempted another blast of dark lightning, but instead he stopped to catch a breather. The non-stop lightning strikes seemed to have worn him out. Seeing this and knowing he couldn't afford not to take action, Charlie Brown charged forward with a light fist, sending Joe into the kitchens.

Joe crashed into the wall beneath a series of cupboards, the vibrations caused said cupboards to open up and a number of food items to fall out and bounce off Joe's head, including apples, eggs, a bag of french fries, tomatoes, potatoes, several heavy metal tins and finally a watermelon, which became stuck over his head.

After a bit of mumbling, Joe pulled the watermelon off his head, a look of utmost fury on his face.

"You're gonna pay for that one!" Joe snarled, picking up a fallen tomato and channeling darkness around it. The tomato turned black and aquired it's own dark aura. Joe threw the darkmato at Charlie Brown's head, Charlie Brown ducked and the tainted vegetable instead hit a collection of overhanging saucepans, exploding on contact.

Seeing this made Charlie Brown gulp, and he turned back to Joe to find the bully channelling darkness into the eggs that hadn't broken in the fall. Charlie Brown summoned a shield to block the attacks, but the explosive eggs combined had enough force to shatter it. Joe picked up the potatoes lying around and prepared another attack. Realizing he didn't have time to summon another shield but noticing an unmelted frying pan lying convieniently nearby, Charlie Brown grabbed the cooking utensile, channelled his light around it and began using it to swat away the dark potatoes before they

exploded.

This worked only for about five seconds. In large part to Charlie Brown's bad baseball skills, he swung at the fourth potato too soon and it struck him dead in the chest, exploding and sending the poor boy flying back into the counter.

With a nasty, eeiry smile Joe used the shadows to lift several sharp knives out of the drawers and point them directly at Charlie Brown. With a nervous spasm, Charlie Brown got up and quickly looked around for anything at all that might save him. Noticing a bowl of gizpacho, which one of the dinner ladies must have left overnight without realizing, Charlie Brown grabbed the bowl and hurled it straight at Joe's face. Miraculously it hit it's target, and the floating knives fell to the floor as the villain staggered back and tried to pull the bowl off his face.

After removing the bowl and cleaning the soup off his face, Joe sent Charlie Brown a death glare and examined the red soup now covering his hands. His eyes widened in fright.

"This wouldn't happen to be gizpacho, would it?" Joe asked cautiously.

"Yes. Well, at least I think it is. Why do you ask?" Charlie Brown replied. His question was answered as several swollen, red boils suddenly popped up on Joe's face.

"I'm alergic" Joe gasped in a wheezy voice.

Charlie Brown watched with a slight sense of pity as Joe clutched his throat and wretched as his allergies acted up. Desparately Joe began channelling regenerative darkness around his face, the swellings soon went down and the bruises covering his face from Charlie Brown's punches started to fade. But when the bruises were half healed, the darkness suddenly vanished from around Joe's head. And Joe's expression made it quite clear he hadn't meant for it to.

"Oh boy" Joe said, a hint of worry in his voice. CHarlie Brown grinned hopefully, it seemed Joe had reached his healing limits. But not one to get too comfortable, Charlie Brown looked down at his bruised and bleeding right hand and channelled some healing light over it. The large cut on the back of Charlie Brown's hand half-healed before the light vanished on it's own accord.

Charlie Brown sighed and looked Joe in the face "Looks like we're both reaching our limits" He said. Joe frowned.

"Well then I guess I'd better finish you quickly" Joe said before flying at Brown with his fists shrouded in darkness.

Charlie Brown leapt over Joe, who seemingly skidded on the air before coming to a stop. The bully turned around, and was struck by a double punch from Charlie Brown as they both went flying through the wall into the history class.

Joe landed on his feet and fired a dark sphere at the Light Guardian, who dodged to the right, the sphere simply obliterating the teachers desk. Charlie Brown kneeled down and sprang at Joe, who ducked under him and grabbed his leg, throwing the hero into the bookcase. Charlie

Brown shook off the crash and saw Joe fire a beam of darkness his way. With a quick groan of pain Charlie Brown rolled out of the way. The beam struck the stand full of history books and reduced them to a pile of ash.

"Talk about making a mess of history" Charlie Brown commented. Joe raised an eyebrow at him, looking genuinely surprised. Charlie Brown stared questionably at him as Joe said:

"Did you just make a joke?" Joe asked oddly "You, Charlie Brown...?" Charlie Brown frowned indignantly.

"What, just because I'm a sadsac I'm not allowed to make jokes?" Charlie Brown asked. Joe just stared at him with raised eyebrow for a minute before shrugging.

"Whatever. It was lame anyway" Joe said casually. A second later he had regained his glare and angry demeanor and charged at Charlie Brown. The rivals exchanged blows before Joe managed to land a hard punch to Charlie Brown's face, causing blood to squirt from his nose. Joe followed this with a kick to the back of the hero, before sending him through another wall with a dark sphere.

Charlie Brown got up off the floor of the Gymnasium, swaying a bit due to his injuries. Joe flew in through the hole in the wall and ran at Brown with his arms morphed into dark blades. With much difficulty, Charlie Brown dodged Joe's attacks. He channelled some light into his palm and, after swiftly avoiding decapitation he struck Joe in the chest with a palm-strike, sending Joe spinning backwards through the air.

Joe regained his balance in mid-air and landed on top of a treadmill in the corner of the room. Ducking under a light sphere aimed for his head, Joe leapt down near the gym's ball pit and pulled out a football. Charlie Brown stared at the ball in Joe's hand and frowned.

"I'm not going to come running up to kick it if that's what you're thinking" Charlie Brown said irritably. Joe laughed.

"I'm pretty sure you would, but that's not my intention" Joe replied. Joe gripped the football tightly, channeling darkness all around the football before punting it in Charlie Brown's direction. Charlie Brown easily ducked out of the way, but Joe rose the shadows behind to create a wall which bounced the ball back, it hit the back of Charlie Brown's head and exploded. Charlie Brown skidded over the floor, writhing in pain.

Despite his pain, despite all the energy it took to perform even the simplest of actions now, Charlie Brown managed to lift his head to see what Joe was doing. The bully had his hand placed on another ball in the cart. Joe began channelling every single shadow in the room into the many balls in the cart. When certain they were all engulfed by darkness, Joe tipped the cart over and allowed all the balls to roll out.

The hundreds of different, darkness-covered balls rolled straight for Charlie Brown. With a groan, Charlie Brown channelled whatever energy he had left and floated up out of the way. Joe, watching from the corner, grinned with satisfaction as he leaned against the wall. His

body melted into shadows and he sank through the wall out of the room.

Charlie Brown meanwhile was left to watch from the air as the balls rolled all across the room. The darkness around them began to spark, which looked to Charlie Brown like a lit fuse on a stick of dynamite. And knowing the results would be exactly the same, Charlie Brown blasted a hole in the nearest wall and flew for it. He managed to make it through in time, but the massive force of the hundred combined explosions still sent him flying down the halls, and through three more classrooms before finally crashing into the teachers lounge, landing on a couch. At least that provided a soft landing for the poor hero.

Charlie Brown panted heavily, lying on his back on the comfy couch and looking up at the lightbulb, which had been turned on at the switch by a piece of flying rubble. Charlie Brown felt awful. Every square inch of his body felt like it was screaming in agony. He could hardly move, and even breathing was becoming a problem for him. But still he managed, beyond all reason, to get up and stand. Despite everything he had been through, despite being dealt a beating that would have left any other living being dead long before now, Charlie Brown still managed to get back up. How, he would never know.

Shadows crawled into the room from cracks in the wall, slowly reforming into the shape of Joe Agate. The evil boy, almost as brutalised and facing the same struggle to remain conscious as his sworn enemy, forced as much dark energy into his hands as his life force allowed and glared at Charlie Brown.

"I confess, despite all the hate I feel for you Brown, your stubbornness and refusal to die despite all my best efforts amazes me. Truly, you are a worthy rival. But it ends here. We both know that only one of us is going to come out of this alive. And I swear, on the life of everyone I know, it will be ME!" And Joe charged forward with his dark fist raised. Charlie Brown, fed up with all the grief he was being forced to endure, let out a rage-filled yell and charged at Joe, tackling him through yet another wall and back out onto the school grounds.

The students, still unmoved from their previous positions from when Charlie Brown and Joe had entered the school, jumped and gasped in awe as Charlie Brown and Joe rolled across the ground, embroiled in a fist fight. Charlie Brown managed to assume a dominant position over Joe and pounded his face with all his might. Joe used both his hands to grab the one hand Charlie used to punch and managed to throw him a few meters away.

Panting, bleeding and sweating like turkeys on Thanksgiving day, the respective warriors of Light and Darkness rose to their feet. The students watched anxiously as Charlie Brown and Joe glared each other out for a full minute. Panting aside, they remained unflinching, though their eyes were alight with loathing for one another.

Finally, Joe held back his hands and squinted his eyes, channelling every square inch of darkness within a hundred meter radius of himself into his palms. At the same time Charlie Brown began drawing forth power from the sun, calling forth all available lights to

empower him.

And in the blink of an eye, their attacks were launched.

Charlie Brown's massive beam of pure white light collided with Joe's humongous beam of darkness. The two fighters pushed with everything they had, determined to overpower one another. At first Charlie Brown seemed to take the advantage, his light beam began pushing back Joe's beam of darkness. Joe staggered back, sinking his feet into the floor. He was being overpowered, but he refused to give up. And so he began to channel his rage, he thought about just how much he hated Charlie Brown. He thought about how he despised the blockhead's very being, and how much he dreamed of having him dead. Joe channelled every last bit of his hatred into his attack, and slowly but surely his dark beam began to overpower Charlie Brown's light one.

Struggling to stand still let alone keep the beam going, Charlie Brown gritted his teeth and called forth all the light inside him to overcome Joe. But it seemed pointless. Despite his best efforts, Charlie Brown's beam of light could not overpower Joe's beam of darkness. As fear overcame him, Charlie Brown worried this was the end...

"Don't give up Chuck!"

Charlie Brown's eyes widened. He turned his head steadily to see his friends watching him. But they didn't look scared, they weren't worrying that their friend was going to die. No, they were sending Charlie Brown looks of encouragement, stubbornly remaining supportive of their friend.

"Yeah, don't give up Charlie Brown, you can do it!" Schroeder yelled determinedly to his friend, who couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"You're way stronger than he is, just keep at it!" Yelled Marcie.

"Go on Charlie Brown, you can do it" -Shermy

"We believe in you!" -Linus.

"Let 'im have it!" -Pigpen

"You can't give up now. You've come this far, you have to win!" -Patty.

"Go on Charlie Brown, you can do it!" -Lucy.

Charlie Brown watched in amazement as his friends cheered him on. It touched his heart that, even in this most grim circumstance, despite all odds stacked against him, they still believed in him.

The light shooting out of Charlie Brown's hands suddenly grew larger. Just the very thought that his friends genuinely had faith in him awakened new power inside Charlie Brown, and the near-bald hero pushed that power to its limits against the might of Joe's darkness.

Joe was forced to scrunch as Charlie Brown's beam of light fought back and reduced the size of his dark beam to half of it's original size. But Joe still refused to give up. He still stubbornly refused to lose to his most hated enemy. And so with that he channelled even more hatred than was conceivable of one person, and the meeting point between the two beams returned to the exact centre position between the hero and villain.

Charlie Brown and Joe struggled to keep their attacks going. At the centre point between their respective beams, the dark and light energies were starting to mix into a sphere. The sphere grew until it reached a massive size, as the continuous stream of dark and light energy finally caused it to explode, sending a giant shockwave throughout the area. Chunks of earth were sent flying, trees standing near the outskirts of the school were uprooted, the remaining portions of the school building still standing collapsed and the Peanuts, Dark followers and just normal students were all blown off their feet, as Charlie Brown and Joe Agate were sent flying off in opposite directions into the fence.

Both groaning in agony, Charlie Brown and Joe Agate lifted their heads and both weakly tried to get up. Charlie Brown slowly lifted his head to look at Joe, panting.

"Hey Joe!" Charlie Brown called to the villain, taking a moment to catch his breath before continuing "Do you mind if... we take... *Pant, cough, pant*... a little break?"

Joe sent Charlie Brown a dirty look, but ultimately lowered his head and agreed "Sure... a little break sounds good right about now!"

"Thank you!" Charlie Brown breathed, and the enemies collapsed to the floor in unison.

After recovering from the aftershock of Charlie Brown and Joe's attack, the Peanuts gang ran over to where Charlie Brown was to support him, while Eggman and the Dark Followers ran to Joe's side. The other students also got closer to Charlie Brown, but kept a slight distance to allow the Peanuts a moment with their founding member.

"Man, have you guys been going at it. I tell ya, I've never seen anything as cool as what you were doing!" Peppermint Patty was telling Charlie Brown enthusiastically as she and Linus helped Charlie Brown to sit up. Snoopy pulled out a wet rag and began wiping the sweat off Charlie Brown's brow while Woodstock applied bandages to all of his open cuts.

"Oh, well, it wasn't too impressive" Charlie Brown tried to be humble, but his friends disagreed.

"Are you kidding, you were awesome!" Shermy insisted "I'm serious, you were really giving Joe a run for his money there! True you're as beat up as he is, but man, you sure showed everyone here what a badass you can be with super powers"

"I agree Charles. Despite everything Joe put you through you still never gave up, and you always hit him back twice as hard. That was very brave" Marcie said with a hint of admiration. Charlie Brown

blushed.

"Well, I guess" Charlie Brown said, his worries melting away as his friends continued complimenting his bravery and skill while also making sure he was alright.

"This fight's looking pretty even right now. But I must say Charlie Brown, if you keep on going like you were then I think you could very well win" Linus said encouragingly. Charlie Brown smiled hopefully.

"You think?" Charlie Brown asked.

"No doubt about it, of course you're gonna win! You're the hero, aren't you big brother, and heroes always win!" Sally cheered with all the excitement you'd expect from a sweet little girl.

"Yeah, of course you can beat him, you're the greatest Charlie Brown!" Cheered... Rerun?

The Peanuts took a moment away from showering Charlie Brown with praise to gape at the new arrival.

"What the-RERUN! What are you doing here, you're supposed to be at school!" Lucy yelled with authority. Rerun shrugged innocently.

"The principal cancelled school when Charlie Brown and Joe crashed through the roof. So I followed Charlie Brown here to watch him fight" Rerun offered his explanation. His siblings did not look pleased.

"Rerun, don't you know how dangerous this is, you could have been killed any moment by a stray beam. Why didn't you just lead the other children in your school to safety?" Linus scolded.

"They're safe enough, but there's no way I'm going to be the only one who misses out on all this coolness" Rerun put it plainly. His older siblings sighed in annoyance, realising it was pointless to argue with that they just decided to let Rerun off the hook for now as the gang quickly went back to telling Charlie Brown how he was bound to win.

Sparky floated forward from the side-lines, sending Rerun a disapproving glance before adding his views to the discussion.

"They do speak the truth Charlie, as long as you keep believing in yourself you are very likely to win" Sparky began encouragingly, but knowing the dangers of overconfidence he clarified "But don't get ahead of yourself. Though you are both exhausted, Joe is still a powerful opponent, and I sense his determination to smite you has not waned a bit since the start of this battle. You must remain focused, fight with every last ounce of strength you possess. Just stay focused, and you have an even chance at victory"

Charlie Brown nodded to the former Guardian, allowing the full meaning of his advice to sink in.

"I know it's not over yet. But no matter how long it takes or how hard it is, I won't give up. I promise" Charlie Brown replied to the spirit dog. Sparky smiled.

"That is all I ask" Sparky said kindly.

While the Peanuts continued to cheer on or otherwise fuss over the wellbeing of their heroic friend, over on the other side of the playground the group of villains were being a tad less emotional in supporting their leader. While Eggman and Melody took the task of hoisting Joe up into a sitting position, Thibault was ranting about the way things were going.

"I mean come on! You're actually letting Charlie Brown put up a fair fight against you! You're supposed to be the super tough, manipulative and cunning Joe Agate, Birchwood's king of bullies. How can you be getting clobbered by CHARLIE BROWN!? It doesn't make sense, it's a mockery to all that's-"

"Thibault, if you don't shut up now I swear I'll focus all the power I have left into cutting out your heart and shoving it back down your throat!" Joe roared venomously at the petite bully. Thibault looked shocked and a bit frightened by his friends outburst. He waved his hands and backed off slightly.

"Wow, hey man, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you" Thibault said in a meek manner that had never been seen from him. Joe looked up at his only friend with an annoyed frown and shook his head.

"I'm sorry 'Bo, I just can't get my head around it either. Charlie Brown is a blockhead, he's the biggest loser on the face of the universe. Even with all those powers he has, killing him should have been as easy as shooting fish in a barrel. So why isn't it?" Joe asked indignantly "Why is Charlie Brown able to put up an even fight against me?"

"Perhaps it's because you've underestimated his true potential" Eggman offered. Joe and pretty much everyone else looked at him as though he were speaking crazy talk. The mustached scientist shrugged and said "I'm just saying. You know, when I first battle Sonic he was completely different from the confident and cool hero he is today. At ten years old Sonic was immature, arrogant, ego-centric, rude and even a little dim. Even though he had super speed, no-one would have thought him a hero. But after he saw me kidnapping small animals to power my machines he rushed to the rescue, and over the years he grew into a brave, kind, confident hero. If you ask me, this Charlie Brown of yours might just be following a similar path"

Joe narrowed his eyes at the mad scientist "So you're saying Charlie Brown's going to beat me?!"

"Maybe. I'm saying that despite his faults, Charlie Brown is still proving himself a capable hero. You might just be in for more than you bargained for" Eggman clarified. Still panting, Joe placed a hand to his forehead and mentally cursed over his situation.

While this was happening the dark followers were all contemplating their decision to join Joe in a new light. They had all expected Joe to have killed Charlie Brown by now, but the two appeared evenly matched. And what Eggman was discussing with Joe now made it sound like Charlie Brown might actually win after all! This got the kids worried, and they all wondered whether they should take Sparky's advice.

"You know what, I think I'm just gonna... stand over there" Tapioca Pudding said cautiously, slowly edging in the direction of the other students.

"Yeah, maybe I'll just go over there too-for a better view of the action" Bad-Call lied, also backing away.

"I'm out too. This isn't working out as well as I'd hoped" Freddie Fabulous said bluntly, turning his back on Joe and starting to walk away with the rest of the group. Joe gritted his teeth.

"EITHER OF YOU TAKE ANOTHER STEP FORWARD AND I'LL BLAST YOU INTO DUST!" Joe screamed with rage. The kids immediately froze where they stood, all in a position where they had one foot in the air prepared to step forward (Making it VERY difficult for them to stay standing).

With the Dark Followers too scared to go anywhere Joe was briefly left to mope in peace.

"This just can't be happening to me" Joe told himself, disillusioned "How am I going to settle this quickly?"

"Easy. Just listen to me!"

The high pitched, eerie voice made all the Dark Followers jump on the spot, still one legged. Eggman, Joe and Thibault however were well acquainted with it.

With a weary look downwards at his coat, Eggman reached into his pocket and pulled out the dark mirror showing the reflection of the Witch. The Dark Followers all got a look in the mirror as Eggman extracted it, and the shock of what they saw made them all finally topple over into a pile on the floor.

Knowing what she wanted to do, Eggman held the mirror down in front of Joe's face, allowing her reflected face to examine him from head to toe.

"You're looking even worse from here than from what I saw from the shadows" The Witch commented on Joe's beaten up appearance.

"You've been watching?" Joe asked.

"But of course. I am able to see through the shadows of this world, and I must admit I agree with Eggman. This Charlie Brown is more capable than I was led to believe by yours and Thibault's tales" The Witch said sternly. Joe frowned at her.

"Hey, it's not my fault Charlie Brown's just instantly a hero, alright! I don't even know how he learned to fight so fast" Joe said defensively.

"Then perhaps you weren't paying proper attention when I described his abilities to you last night" The Witch said while giving Joe the evil eye, which was so effective on her that it even frightened Joe out of his wits "We Guardians have a natural warriors instinct. It doesn't matter how low his overall skill level is to start, but the more he fights the more his Guardian instincts kick in, allowing him

to accomplish attacks and powers previously unknown to him. Like when he trapped you in that sphere for example. You should have focused on finishing this fight early on, before he had a chance to develop his skills further through battle"

"Yeah, I see that now" Joe said off-handedly "But what am I supposed to do at this point? If this keeps up both Brown and I are both gonna end up dead"

"Or worse, he could defeat you" The Witch offered grimly. Joe sneered.

"No way. I wouldn't lose, this is gonna end up a draw at worse" Agate insisted. The Witch snarled.

"You're letting your personal quarrels blind you! He beat you once before, didn't he?! There's nothing saying he can't honestly defeat you here!" The Witch's reflection bellowed.

"Then what do I do!?" Joe yelled. It wasn't an angry yell. It wasn't even one of annoyance. For the first time, Joe was speaking in desperation, pleading for answers. "What do I do..."

In the mirror, the Witch brought a long scabby finger to her chin and frowned thoughtfully, mulling over her options. Nearby the Dark Followers were done shaking off their fall and staring at the Witch talking to Joe in the mirror in open mouthed shock. Thibault drifted his eyes away from the mirror to the kids, and noticing their expression he decided to comment.

"What? After all the crazy stuff you've just seen Joe and Brown do why should this surprise you?" Thibault asked them. The kids glanced at Thibault momentarily before turning back to Joe and the mirror, their expressions remaining unchanged the whole time.

The Dark Witch thought a little more, and a disturbingly pleasant smile crept up her face as she came up with a most diabolical plan.

"It's clear to me that a physical assault against Charlie Brown would be taking a major risk" The Witch commented, her grin growing wider as she continued "So... maybe we ought to try a mental assault..."

Joe stared questionably at the Witch's reflection. The Guardian of Darkness nodded her head.

"Lean in a bit closer Joe. I've got another move I'd like to quickly teach you"

Back with Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang, Snoopy and Woodstock had just finished bandaging up most of Charlie Brown's wounds and Peppermint Patty and Violet were just helping him stand again. Sparky looked down protectively at the hero, then snuck a glance over at the villains on the other side of the grounds. His expression grew cold as he noticed Joe talking into the dark mirror.

"What's wrong?" Franklin asked, noticing where the spirit dog was staring.

"That mirror in Eggman's hand. It is one of the mirrors of twilight" Sparky replied, catching the attention of the others "It is one of the many mirrors my sister gave to her highest ranking followers during my last war against her before I sealed her away. She used it to communicate with people in this realm"

This news certainly perked up the Peanuts, who were frightened by the thought of Joe, Thibault and Eggman communicating with the Witch just five yards away from them. With everyone now watching anxiously as Joe spoke into the mirror of twilight, Violet asked "What do you think they're talking about?"

"That, Violet, I would very much like to know..." Sparky said gravely.

The Peanuts watched apprehensively as Joe gave the Witch in the mirror a nod and then stepped past the crowd of his unwitting followers. Tensing up and feeling more than a bit nervous after what he'd just seen, Charlie Brown steadied himself and stepped forward aswell.

"Well Charlie Brown, it's been swell, but I'm afraid our quarrel ends here!" Joe declared from further away.

"So does that mean you're giving up?!" Charlie Brown called.

"No, it means that in another few minutes you'll be pushing up daisies!" Joe shot back. Thibault and Eggman laughed sinisterly, while even the other kids looked more assured for Agate's victory. This worried Sparky and the Peanuts. Just what was Joe planning.

Standing in place, Joe made several odd movements with his hands, which vaguely resembled sign language. Joe made about a dozen of these hand signs before clapping his hands together and charging darkness in his cupped hands. Sparky's eyes widened in terror as he recognised what was happening.

"Charlie, everyone, get out of the way!" Sparky suddenly yelled. The kids looked worriedly to the spirit "I mean it, everyone take cover behind the school, out of Joe's line of fire. NOW"

"What's going on, what's he doing?" Schroeder demanded.

"NOW" Sparky repeated even more urgently. Realising the issue was not up for debate the Peanuts began frantically herding the rest of the student body towards the smoldering remains of the school so they could take cover. But Charlie Brown remained completely in place, seemingly transfixed at Joe's actions. Sparky noticed his motionlessness hallway towards the school and looked back in terror at him.

"Charlie, it is imperative that you get behind cover. Move!" Sparky commanded.

But it was already too late. Joe had finished charging up energy. A sudden gust of wind picked up, blowing in the direction towards Charlie Brown. Before the bald-looking hero's very eyes Agate's body devolved into a black mist, blown by the rapid winds towards the hero.

Finally registering what was going on, Charlie Brown set up a light shield to defend himself immediately. But the shadowy mist simply moved around the barrier and surrounded Charlie Brown. As Charlie Brown dispersed his shield he found his entire body enshrouded in the thick smoke.

The Peanuts watched gasping in horror as the dark mist circled their friend. Charlie Brown tried shaking the smoke away, but it was no use. Things only got creepier as the mist slowly seeped in through Charlie Brown's skin, being absorbed completely into his body.

For a moment after the mist sank in Charlie Brown just stood there, staring blankly into space. Then he clutched his head and screamed out in agony. His friends caught a brief glimpse of his eyes flashing yellow before they sealed completely, and Charlie Brown fell backwards onto the floor, unconscious.

For a moment the Peanuts simply watched on in horror at their fallen friend. Then all at once they ran to his side. Linus immediately kneeled down and checked for a pulse.

"I think he's still alive... but... oh God, what just happened there?" Linus couldn't comprehend just what was happening here. The Peanuts looked down in shock and worry as Sparky drifted forward to explain.

"This is one of my sister's most despicable techniques. What's basically happened is that Joe has entered Charlie Brown's mind, no doubt in an effort to crush his subconscious mind. The end results would be worse than murder" The kids' eyes widened in horror at these words from the spirit. They all looked down desparately at their friend, too frightened for words.

An uncharacteristic look of rage on his face, Sparky turned his head in the direction of the Dark Followers. Thibault was laughing maniacally at these new developments, and Eggman was still holding the mirror of twilight in his hand. With a growl, Sparky sped forward towards the oval scientist.

"Sister, what have you done?" Sparky growled at the mirror, not even acknowledging the presence of anyone else.

"Nice to see you again too, brother" The Witch's reflection replied nonchelantly. Sparky's eyes narrowed.

"I am in no mood for plesentries, sister. What were you thinking, teaching Joe to use that forbidden technique?" Sparky demanded furiously.

"Um, I was thinking I wanted my dark warrior to win, duh?" The Witch replied calmly "I don't know if you've forgotten, but we're at war. I'm not concerned with playing fair, I just want your little Guardian buddy over there dead. Of course I'll need to seal away his power before killing him, but still, having his mind shattered seems like such a good way to assure my victory"

"This is wrong sister, this is sick and wrong" Sparky scolded his sister's image. The Witch frowned at him.

"Look, I know what's on your mind, and I want you to give it up already. I am no longer a submissive errand-girl for the Ancients, now I am fighting for the betterment of the universe. I believe in everything I am doing. If you think you can inspire shame in me by saying it's wrong to do what is natural and eliminate the forces trying to stop me, then I should tell you to give up, it won't work. For your sakes stop thinking you can talk me out of being "Evil" As you call it, it's not going to work" The Witch put it plainly to her deceased brother. Sparky's frown lessened from an angry frown to a sad one.

"I agree. I wish I could convince you, but I know from all my experiences with you I can't. I had just thought you would have more honour than to subject a thirteen year old boy to such gratuitous mind-rape" Sparky clarified his point. Without a single glance to Eggman, Thibault or any of the Dark Followers watching him Sparky began to float off. He stopped momentarily, without turning around, to add just one more thing "If you truly believed in freedom, then you wouldn't have ever allowed yourself to sink to this level. If you truly cared about anyone, you wouldn't torture and ruthlessly murder those who simply wanted to do the right thing"

From within the mirror The Witch glared at her brother, seemingly offended by what he was saying. Sparky floated back to where Charlie Brown had fallen, the Peanuts turning to him for guidance.

"Ok, now that I have vented my anger we must hurry to the task at hand" Spary said while lowering himself down over Charlie Brown.

"And that task is...?" Sally asked expectantly.

"Saving Charlie Brown before Joe shatters his mind" Sparky replied. The gang looked on in uncertainty as Sparky summoned his little remaining power and turned his hands solid. Gripping Charlie Brown's hand with his left, Sparky also held his right hand out towards Franklin.

"Take my hand. If my hunch is correct, I'm going to need all of your help if we're going to get Charlie Brown to pull through this"

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Wow. I'll admit, this chapter and the previous took forever to write, but in the end I think it was all worth it. I've got a lot of part two written, but it might still take me a while to finish it off, knowing me. I hope you all loved this as much as I loved writing it, though I worry some parts may have dragged on a bit this was still my favourite chapter so far, and it makes this my favourite story to write for so far. Like I said, I originally meant for the battle between Charlie Brown and Joe to be one chapter, but because this is all turning out so long I cut it in half for convenience, and I think this makes a good cliffhanger if I do say so myself. I'll get part two up as soon as I can. Also, I've decided I will indeed wait until next chapter to release the final list of series that will be used in future chapters of this story, mostly because one day wasn't enough to get people's final opinions. Anyway, there's a lot I would like to say, but never mind. If you have any questions please leave them in your reviews and I'll answer them as soon as I can.

7. Light vs Dark, Part 2

****Tiger Lover 16:** Hello. I'm back. Been a while I know, but all my chapters are far and in between. Ok, there's a lot I have to say, including 2 very important announcements I have to make, but I think that's all better left for the notes at the bottom of the page. First off, I want to say that, again, I'm only half satisfied with this chapter. The first half of the chapter... really wasn't what I had been hoping it would be. For a while it seemed to work the way I intended it to, but things just started to get repetitive and, I was worried it was getting a bit boring, so a few bits that didn't really seem necessary were left out and some parts not written, and I had to rewrite a bunch of it. It's a really complicated scene, and I was always worried about how it was going to work, So I'm sorry if this chapter doesn't really live up to expectations. It doesn't live up to mine at least, but I have a whole story left to make up for that, some things need to remain open ended anyway for the sake of the plot. Hope it doesn't feel too rushed, or on the other hand too long, this is another pretty long chapter and in some parts I'm worried it may drag. Oh well, overall it fulfils it's purpose, so I'm happy with that. It's the chapters that come after this I'm really looking forward to anyway. I'll talk more in the second authors notes, for now please enjoy the finale to this introductory arc.**

* * *

><p>Chapter 6, Light vs Dark: part 2

****(Charlie Brown's mindscape)****

Charlie Brown suddenly found himself surrounded by endless darkness. The frightened Guardian stared around himself, praying that this was just a hallucination or some weird dream. His mind was a bit blurry, but he could faintly remember Joe's body turning to black smoke, and how it had surrounded and sunk into him.

But what did that mean for him. Where was Charlie Brown now? The boy's immediate, and most horrifying thought was that this was the Realm of Darkness, where the Dark Witch herself resided. But then, if that were true, then where was the Witch? Surely if he were in her Realm she'd come to kill him straight away. Charlie Brown hoped this wasn't the Realm of Darkness after all. But still... where the heck was he!?

At the risk of complete and utter destruction, Charlie Brown stepped forward and called out "Hello?"

No response. In fact, there was no sound at all in this place. The eeiry silence worried Charlie Brown even more, and he decided he would have to get out of here as quickly as possible.

Remembering his experience from last night at his house, Charlie Brown focused his energy and attempted to open a portal, if not back home then at least to the Light Palace, where it wasn't so dark...

Nothing happened. Try as he might, Charlie Brown was unable to open a portal, or even light his hands up at all. That couldn't mean

anything good.

For a while Charlie Brown just stood still in the darkness, too afraid to break the silence. The lack of sound created an atmosphere of suspense, and Charlie Brown waited, in fear, for something to happen...

...

...

...

"YOU BLOCKHEAD"

Charlie Brown leaped ten feet into the air, landing unsteadily on his feet and spinning around, looking for any sign of the booming, familiar voice that had called out to him.

"You're so wishy washy, Charlie Brown!" Another, equally familiar voice called out. Then more voices that Charlie Brown knew shouted out from the shadows.

"Failure face!"

"Get out of here, blockhead!"

"Chuck, you can't do anything right!"

That last voice Charlie Brown was able to identify without question as belonging to Peppermint Patty. But... where was she. And just why was she insulting him? Why were all of these voices, those certainly of his other friends, mocking him?

Bemused, Charlie Brown continued to look around for any sign of life other than himself in this dark place. Finally, when he was turning around for the seventh time, someone appeared. Materialising right before his eyes was Lucy. But Charlie Brown knew the moment he saw her that she wasn't a good sign. For one thing she had a frown on her face. Not so unusual for Lucy, but this frown was worse than any Charlie Brown had ever seen on the crabby girl. And he had seen her angry LOTS of times. And of course, her anger seemed to be directed squarely at him.

"You blockhead! You screw up even the most meaningless tasks! Why do you keep trying even though you're a conceited failure!?" The crabby girl, or perhaps merely a hallucination of her, screamed in Charlie Brown's face. Immediately after that she cried out another insult, though this seemed out of sink with her previous yells, as though she were using it in a completely different situation "You drive me crazy!"

"I-Lucy, I... I-" Charlie Brown stammered, not sure how he was supposed to react. He was even more shocked when Lucy suddenly faded away. He was not alone for long though, another of his friends appeared momentarily behind him.

"You're weak! You're a real jellyfish! You're dumb and ignorant and you have a silly face!" Spat the similarly angry illusion of Violet Gray. Her rageful scowl lingered for a moment after she too had

vanished, to be replaced by an also volatile Sally.

"Some big brother you are!" His sister's echo screamed, pointing an accusing finger at Charlie Brown "You were right there when those big dumb bullies pushed me down, and you didn't do anything about it!"

This last statement finally gave Charlie Brown a slight idea about what was going on here. He knew for sure that Sally had once said those exact words to him once before. And so that must have meant that these illusions of his friends and his sister, and everything the voices were saying, were memories,

Charlie Brown reached out for the translucent form of his sister. He knew she wasn't real, but... another part of him felt otherwise. He held out his hand pleadingly and tried to explain, but she disappeared at that moment, as Marcie popped up to his right.

"I walk all the way over to your house to ask you a question, and all you can say is "Do I what?" " Marcie's angry, familiar remark "Forget it Charles-you're-not worth my time!" Those last words sounded rather disconnected, as though someone had edited them together rather poorly, but Charlie Brown was sure they were words Marcie had spoken to him at some point. As with Sally, Charlie Brown reacted to the fake Marcie as though she were real.

"Marcie, I didn't mean-" Charlie Brown tried desperately to say something, but she stuck up her hand to silence him.

"Forget it, Charles!" Marcie repeated, looking bitter and disappointed at the light blond boy. Her words made Charlie Brown feel hurt and guilty. Again Marcie vanished, and once more the figure of Lucy stood before him.

"Nobody will ever love you! Not with that frown and that round head of yours!" Lucy taunted, laughing derisively at his unappealing appearance. Charlie Brown clutched his heart, that last one actually hurt. The insults were upsetting him so badly, it was starting to hurt.

And it seemed the worst had yet to come. All around Charlie Brown more intangible illusions of each of his friends in turn were springing forth from the darkness, all with an insult, taunt or degradory remark of their own. Some of which included:

"I don't know why I put up with you!" From Schroeder.

"Boy are you stupid Charlie Brown!" Patty yelled.

"You're hopeless, completely hopeless" Freida said snidely.

"You never do anything! All you ever do is just stand there! You drive everybody crazy! I'm so mad I could scream! I AM SCREAMING!" Linus raged.

Charlie Brown looked on in fear as the memories of his friends criticisms haunted him, mocked him. It drove him to the point of tears, seeing every one of the people he cared about gang up on him to express anger and resentment towards him. And if the words weren't bad enough, there were also images like Patty pushing him off the

swing, Sally grabbing him and holding him up by the collar, Linus, Marcie and Lucy giving Charlie Brown a kick after he said something stupid to each of them. And he even saw himself, running towards a football held down by Lucy, as she pulled it away. This particular memory must have replayed over a hundred times before being replaced by another image of him getting chewed out by Peppermint Patty and Franklin (Who's voices seemed almost artificial this time, but Charlie Brown didn't catch that).

The taunting sounds of his friends anger, mixed with disrespect, eventually caused Charlie Brown to scream out in agony and collapse on his knees, clutching his head as he begged the images to get out of his head.

"Make it stop! MAKE IT STOP!" Charlie Brown wailed, his face flushed and his entire body trembling in fear.

And so it did stop. The illusions of his friends vanished, and their voices became distant before trailing off entirely. Charlie Brown stood alone in the darkness, silence filling the air once more. While Charlie Brown wept, the shadows behind him began to rise up from the ground. A misty, shadowy figure appeared in the darkness: Joe Agate.

Smiling with pleasure as he watched Charlie Brown cry and mope over the torment he had just endured, Joe, his legs replaced by a cloud of purple mist, hovered forward in front of Charlie Brown.

"Make it stop?" Joe repeated Charlie Brown's words. Charlie stopped feeling sorry for himself for just a brief moment to look up over his hands at the shadowy villain "You mean deny you the truth? I can't do that, I'm afraid"

Seeing Joe Agate here, and that he was clearly more self aware and real than the images of his friends he had just witnessed made Charlie Brown's blood boil. He removed his hands from his face and glared at the evil boy.

"So-so this is all your doing, isn't it" Charlie Brown pointed the blame on Joe, who merely smiled at him "Where are we? What sick, twisted plain of existence have you dragged me to?"

To Charlie Brown's ire Joe laughed at his question, clearly he knew.

"Why, don't you recognise the inside of your own head?" Joe asked casually, Charlie Brown raised an eyebrow "This is your mind Charlie Brown. The deepest, darkest, truest part of your mind"

Charlie Brown's eyes widened in shock at what he had just heard, then his face contorted with anger as he realised the shadow boy's intrusion.

"What are you doing in my head?!" Charlie Brown demanded. Joe smirked wickedly at him.

"Oh, I'm simply here to show you how people really think about you" Joe said, perfectly honest and sincerity in his voice. Charlie Brown narrowed his eyes, urging the dark warrior to continue. His smirk growing wider, Joe revealed more of his intentions "I dragged you far

into your subconscious, to the vault of your saddest, most depressing thoughts and memories. I'm here to show you that the people you call friends are really not"

Charlie Brown stared at the bully in disbelief. He would not allow Joe to mislead him.

"That's a lie Joe! I have lots of friends, and they all care about me" Charlie Brown said defensively. Joe shook his head, the smile never leaving his face.

"You poor, misguided soul" Joe said almost pitifully. He looked Brown straight in the eye and told him "Those people you call your Peanuts gang, they don't really care about you. They associate with you, and they play for your baseball team, but none of that has anything to do with genuine friendship. The only reason any of them started hanging out with you as kids is because they didn't know what a sadsac, annoying, mopy little failure face you really were. And then when they got a taste of your true self, they all just felt too sorry for you to abandon you completely. They don't like you at all, they only call themselves your friends because they feel sorry for you"

Charlie Brown shook his head, looking away from Agate. "You're... you're wrong" Was all Charlie Brown could say. But he failed to hide the doubt from his face, and it made Joe happy to see it.

"You don't know that for sure though, do you?" Agate asked craftily "Secretly you do know I'm right. You're always going on about how no-one likes you, after all. You're always complaining about how your life sucks and nothing ever goes right for you. I mean, for crying out loud, that's enough reason that someone would not want to hang out with you, when all you ever talk about is your failures. But you're also a clutz, you screw up the most meager of tasks and you constantly get in everyones way. Your negative influence affects all those around you aswell, your baseball team is constantly losing because you're such a lousy leader, and you're always making things worse for your "Friends". Now tell me, would you want to be around someone like that?"

Charlie Brown's complexion seemed to darken, as all the colour left his face. He looked down at the ground, worry and doubt plaguing his soul.

"You think of Lucy, Peppermint Patty, Linus and all of them as friends, but when do they treat you like one? They're always critiscising you" Joe said, snapping his fingers to summon forth another hologram of Lucy.

"You're a complete and utter blockhead!" Lucy screeched, highlighting Joe's point. He continued.

"They say the most cruel of things..." Another snap of his fingers, and Violet replaced Lucy.

"It goes without saying that you are an inferior human being!" She yelled with utmost venom.

"They take advantage of you all the time" Another snap, and a second Charlie Brown appeared talking on the phone.

"You need my help? Really?" The memory of Charlie Brown asked into the phone, Peppermint Patty on the other line "Could use another good pitcher on your baseball team, huh?" He asked excitedly.

"No, we just need you to wear the pelican costume Chuck" Peppermint Patty's voice replied, and past Charlie Brown's smile changed to a disappointed frown. Joe grinned at the detrimental effect this was all having on the real Charlie Brown.

"You see, they all think you're some meaningless joke. Even your self-proclaimed best friend isn't at all fond of you? Should we replay that glorious clip of Linus yelling about how mad you make him?" Joe asked tauntingly, summoning forth the furious image of Linus. Charlie Brown covered his face, scared of what was to come. And so the reflection of Linus bellowed his criticism,

"You never do anything! All you ever do is just stand there! You drive everybody crazy! I'm so mad I could scream! I AM SCREAMING!" Linus roared. Joe dismissed his illusion and scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"And all that because you didn't talk to Heather before she moved away for a few months. I understand though, it must be SO annoying having to constantly listen to someone go on and on about a girl he's never even met, how's she's so perfect and he would never be able to get her to like him, and always chickening out when he tried to talk to her. I'm surprised Linus didn't snap at you much sooner than that actually, that sort of thing is enough to drive anyone crazy" Joe said with a hint of humour. He gave Charlie Brown a sly grin as he added "And that's just one of the arguments you've had. Though he pretends to care about your feelings and what you have to say, it's obvious to everyone but you that Linus is quite sick of your emotioness. And if Linus, the one person who manages to put on a respectful facade better than any of your friends can hate you that much, what does that say about your other followers...?"

By now the colour was rapidly receding from Charlie Brown's skin. His eyes were sad and shallow, and his hand tremors growing worse than ever. Desparately he searched his mind for a reply, wanting more than anything to tell Joe that everything he had said was wrong. But... nothing came to him. All he could do was wallow in his own misery as Joe continued to put him down to his face.

"It's a sad truth, I know. But you have to know this. You need to know just how meaningless your existence truly is" Joe said coldly, Charlie Brown looked back miserably at him, despite the pain it caused him he couldn't help but hang onto every word "Your constant screw ups are a constant source of frustration and grief for the people you care about, and they don't share your feelings of friendship anyway. Tell me, where's the point in trying to save people who don't even want you in their lives? Every second you live, every second you're with your friends, you're dragging them all down into your pit of misery, making their lives considerably worse just by being there. Tell me, is that what you want?"

Charlie Brown, his face sunken and remorseful, could only shake his head in reply. Joe smirked, patting Charlie Brown's shoulder "It's a little known fact that your existence is pointless. You've never gone a day without failing at something and getting upset, nothing ever

has and ever will go right for you. You think being Guardian of Light is some sort of honour, bestowed on you because you were someone special? Well come now, we both know it was a fluke. This sort of power was meant for someone who could actually utilise it to it's full potential and keep the universe safe. By accidentally gaining these powers, you've denied a real hero the chance to become Guardian, putting the universe in even graver danger by being an inefficient Guardian. Sparky knows this, the only reason he says any different is because he's now completely desperate, but even he knows the universe is doomed if you're the only hope of salvation. Everything he's said to encourage you is a lie! And you know it, don't you?"

Charlie Brown was on his knees and hands at this point, unable to even look Joe in the eye. This latest news filled him with guilt. And he couldn't deny any of it. He'd known all along he wasn't a hero, he'd known all along he was liable to screw things up. For all the power he had, Charlie Brown still couldn't defeat Joe in battle. And now look where that had landed him! And Joe was right, soon the entire universe was going to get covered in darkness, soon everyone who lived was going to suffer. All because of him, all because Charlie Brown, the absolute worst candidate, had been given the power of the Guardian. Charlie Brown tried with all his willpower to deny it, to believe that what Sparky said about him being capable was true. But then... what Joe said about Sparky, that he lied to him... he couldn't believe it. He didn't want to believe it. But his heart had sank so low, his confidence shattered into so many pieces, all he could do was accept Joe's words as truth.

Joe watched as Charlie Brown shuddered on his knees, his skin chalk white and his body frail and weary. Joe smirked, now was the time. The boy's psyche was damaged enough, it would be so easy to take his life now. To kill him and assure victory.

But no... not just yet. Joe still wanted to see Charlie Brown suffer a little bit more.

"Poor Charlie Brown..." Joe said, faking a sympathetic tone as he floated around the fallen hero "Poor, poor Charlie Brown. All alone. No friends. Your family doesn't care. Your own dog just uses you as a servant. The whole world is against you. Even the Gods look down on you. No one cares about good ol' Charlie Brown..."

Panting heavily, Charlie Brown managed to lift his head up to look at Joe. Despite his misery, despite everything Joe had told him, it seemed Charlie Brown still had a bit of denial left in him.

"No... no, this can't be right" Charlie Brown said deliriously "My friends... they do care... last night, Linus said they all wanted to make amends for the times they've treated me badly. They all came to cheer for me... they were going to miss me when I had to leave"

Charlie Brown could do nothing but grimace as Joe laughed at his face and grinned sinisterly.

"I do so love squashing your hopes" Joe said cruelly "No, Charlie Brown. Your friends really don't care. I would have thought all those memories I showed you clarified that. What Linus said just fits into my earlier statement about everyone feeling sorry for you since

you're so pathetic. They just wanted you to think they truly cared because they all wanted to spare themselves the guilt of making you feel too bad about yourself, even though it's all lies. They've been doing that for years, and that's largely the reason you've grown to be so pathetic and weak!"

Charlie Brown shuddered uncontrollably, still trying to look defiant "They still came"

"Came because they had no other choice" Joe said craftily "They heard me say I would kill them all when I defeated you. The only reason they encouraged you to keep fighting and came to "Cheer" for you is because they knew they had no hope but to use you to save their own hides. They certainly knew you would lose, but they also realized they had absolutely no other chance of salvation. So they kept up their facade long enough to see if you would save them. False hope of course, but that's why they came, not because they care about what happens to you. And as for them missing you when you had to leave to fulfil your duties, that's the biggest lie of all! They're not going to miss you, your friends will be glad when you're gone!"

Charlie Brown shook his head, tears staining his sunken face as he tried desperately to deny what Joe was saying "N-no. No, they care! They... care..." Charlie Brown's face fell again, his tears leaking onto the floor in a puddle as Joe took great pleasure in his misery.

"No they don't care" Joe said savagely "What do you think I've been telling you!? They hate you, you're a pest to them. The bane of their existence. Your "Friends" may have told you they'd miss you, but really they'll be happy to have Mr Wishy Washy, Failure Face out of the way to stop glooming up their day. Why, I bet they were even planning a party to celebrate your absence!"

Joe grabbed Charlie Brown's barely-existing hair and pulled up his head to look him in the face as he spoke his next words "That is the truth Charlie Brown. I have just told you the full, honest truth about your friends. About you. Unlike your little Peanuts gang I don't lie. You're a failure, a friendless, freaky little emo kid that no-one likes. And no matter how much you try to persevere, no matter how many times you try to improve yourself, none of that is ever going to change. You'll never be a hero, and no one will ever like you"

Finished assaulting Charlie Brown's soul with his cruel words, Joe released his grip on the boy's hair and allowed Charlie Brown to fall on his face onto the ground of his mindscape. Joe's harsh words and mental torture had by now crushed all sense of hope within the hero, any happy or even slightly positive thoughts had been pushed so far back into his mind that all Charlie Brown was able to comprehend was his own overwhelming sadness and self-pity. All Charlie Brown could do now was cry, as Joe stood triumphantly over him.

"The life of a blockhead is such a sad, lonely existence" Joe said softly "Better to die than live a life without joy. Better to die than live a life where all you'll ever know is suffering. Would you like me to kill you Brown?"

Charlie Brown didn't reply, his voice seemed to have been lost with his confidence. Not really needing an answer anyway, Joe just took

his silence as a yes.

"Goodbye Charlie Brown. I'd say it was nice knowing you, but I wouldn't want to lie" Joe said with a hint of irony. The Warrior of Darkness forged a sharp dagger from the shadows of Charlie Brown's mindscape. Slowly he lifted it into the air, ready to finally put an end to Charlie Brown's existence. After what he had just been through, Charlie Brown didn't even care to register what was happening. After a few seconds of stalling, Joe prepared to bring the dagger down into the centre of Charlie Brown's head...

"Charlie, NO!"

A blinding light suddenly erupted from behind Charlie Brown. Joe was blinded by the intensity of the light, and a mysterious force seemed to be pushing him far backwards into the depths of the mindscape. The suddenness of what had happened was just enough to make Charlie Brown look up in surprise. Noticing straight away that his surrounding had brightened up significantly, Charlie Brown turned to see the ghostly figure of Sparky hovering before him.

"Charlie, you must not listen to what this deranged hooligan has to say. He claims to offer you the truth of your existence, but every word he has thus far spoken to you has been a lie!" Sparky's fatherly, empowering voice seemed to have awakened a new life in Charlie Brown. While he was still depressed and frail, the presence of someone he knew on good terms seemed to bring back a few more of his senses.

"Sp-Sparky...?" Charlie Brown asked, shocked by the presence of the spirit in his mind. Sparky reached out and held Charlie Brown's hand. Surprisingly solid for a spirit, Sparky proceeded to lift Charlie Brown back onto his feet and wipe the tears from his eyes.

"Do not believe a thing Joe has told you about yourself, or your friends. Despite what Joe believes, and despite what you fear to be the truth, you are not a complete failure. You are NOT a pathetic excuse for a human being. You are the embodiment of all that is good in human kind" Sparky stubbornly, and truthfully told the platinum blond boy "It is true that you have your faults, many even. But so does everyone. You think Joe is perfect? It is because of his faults that he is here torturing you now. Your friends each have as many faults as you do, whether it be insecurity, crabbiness, ignorance or snobbery, every human being has something wrong with them. Everyone makes mistakes. Just because you have the unfortunate habit of failing at many tasks does not make you worthless, nor does it make your friends despise you. For all of your faults Charlie Brown, you still succeed where many others would fail: You never give up. Even when all odds are stacked against you, you still carry on, and even when you fail you always get up and try again. That is a vital quality that so many others lack, and what makes you a truly wonderful, heroic person"

Charlie Brown's dark, lifeless complexion seemed to brighten up ever so slightly as Sparky spoke to him, and more colour flooded to his face as Sparky continued "I know life has been rough for you Charlie. I know that it seems the world is against you. But that is a fear that you must overcome. Because the truth, the real truth, is that you have a lot in life to live for"

At this point Joe Agate's shadowy form reappeared and pushed Sparky out of the way, glaring resentfully at the dog spirit.

"Like what! Nothing in Charlie Brown's life is worth living for! He sucks at EVERYTHING he does and everybody hates him. His "Friends" don't give a damn about him! Does that sound like a lot to live for?!" Joe screamed, determined to keep the spirit from ruining all his hard work. Charlie Brown lowered his head and sighed. Sparky merely glared and shoved Joe aside.

"I would not expect a vile and conniving brat like you to understand anything about the good in life, let alone the values of friendship" The spirit said coldly as he hovered passed Joe to address Charlie Brown again "As I have said, you are a good and honest person. And despite what Joe has told you, your friends do not hate you. If they had despised the very fabric of your existence half as much as Joe claimed, then they wouldn't have stuck by you for all these years. And no, that is not because they feel sorry for you. No one would fake friendship with a person for 5 to 9 years simply out of pity. It was genuine friendship that kept you and your friends together for this long, because they really wanted to be with you. Despite your obvious faults, and even when you have done something to anger or annoy them, your friends still stand by you as they always have. Not through pity, but genuine, and cherished friendship"

A certain twinkle of life seemed to shine in Charlie Brown's eyes, which were no longer shallow and sunken into his face. He looked hopefully at the spirit, wanting more than anything to believe him to be right. Joe snorted loudly.

"Yeah, and that's why they're always criticising him and putting him down. Get real. If Charlie Brown's self-proclaimed friends really cared about him, they wouldn't go out of their way to treat him like S*#!. Didn't you see my clip show earlier?!" Joe yelled defiantly at the spirit, who merely narrowed his eyes and sucker punched the Agate boy to keep him quiet.

"As a matter of fact I AM aware of that horrible collection of bad memories you showed Charlie earlier. And I must say, if your intentions, as you claim, were to show Charlie Brown how his friends truly felt about him, then you failed spectacularly. You showed Charlie Brown only the worst moments he's had with his friends. There have been plenty of times where they were there for him, where they showed they really did care" Sparky explained. Facing Charlie Brown, Sparky held out his arms and summoned dozens of floating balls of light around Charlie Brown.

Charlie Brown watched as the ball of light grew and assumed shapes resembling a stretched out television. And like a television, these squares of light showed a collection of moving images. Memories of Charlie Brown's past that couldn't have been more different from the ones Joe had shown him.

Looking between the various screens Charlie Brown saw himself with Lucy, both very young and the latter looking surprisingly innocent. Charlie Brown was teaching Lucy about the swing set, and gently giving the girl her very first push on the swings, all the while Lucy laughed and cheered for Charlie Brown to push higher. It then cut to later when Lucy hugged and thanked Charlie Brown for the good time. The screen next to it showed Charlie Brown sitting in a chair by

Linus's bedside, no doubt from the time Lucy had attached Linus' blanket to a kite and sent it flying away to parts unknown. Charlie Brown promised to be there to comfort Linus in this desperate, frightening time, and Linus was so grateful to his loyal friend. On yet another screen was Charlie Brown with Sally. The present Charlie Brown recognised this as the time Sally had gotten a new pet hamster only to have it die a few weeks afterwards. The Charlie Brown from the memory cradled his crying sister, promising things would be alright and that her furry friend was in a happier place now. Sally hugged her brother tightly, the two sharing a truly tender moment as brother and sister.

Charlie Brown's eyes grew wider and wider as he continued glancing between the screens. Dozens and dozens of happy memories swam before his eyes. Among them were Schroeder standing up for him when Violet gave him a used valentine after Valentines day, Snoopy hugging him after returning home from Lila's, Marcie telling him she thought Charlie Brown was real special, Rerun's extreme gratitude for Charlie Brown winning back his marbles from Joe Agate, Franklin consoling him at the wall, Peppermint Patty noticing his sadness and actually kissing him on the cheek while saying "Poor sweet baby", four year old Charlie Brown and Violet exchanging valentines, Violet at first complaining it wasn't a very big one until Charlie Brown pointed out it was the biggest he could afford and she had an instant change of heart, and Charlie Brown's entire group of friends lifting him in the air and singing "Champion Charlie Brown!". And there were many more memories, many, many more good times where his friends showed true and undeniable respect and friendship for Charlie Brown. Truth be told, if I tried to describe them all to you, it would take me a whole nother chapter to do it.

All the while Charlie Brown looked on in awe at the memories. So many good times... he had forgotten so many of these happy memories, all these fun times he'd had with his friends. He could feel his heart warm as the memories washed over him, reminding him that his friends weren't as heartless as Joe made them out to be.

After more than three hundred instances occurred on the screens they suddenly faded away. Charlie Brown held out his hand pleadingly, not wanting the happy memories to stop. Sparky floated down in front of him, a comforting look on his face.

"I can never deny that your friends have treated you unfairly in the past. Some more than others. And though there may be times where you feel your friendship with them is in doubt, though they have all lost their patience with you many times, your bonds have never been broken. They stay with you because they want to be your friends, because you have always been a key part of their lives, and they want it to remain that way" Sparky explained tenderly to the wide eyed boy "And don't ever let Joe convince you that they all hate you just because you have a few arguments. All friends have fallings out, all friends have times when they get on each others nerves and say nasty things. Even best friends don't get along all the time. That was the case with Linus that day, nothing more. Your problem has always been that you take everything too personally Charlie Brown, whenever a friend of yours says one bad thing or throws a fit, you take it to mean that nobody likes you. Well that's wrong. You know your friendship is genuine when you can have arguments, but still remain on good terms afterwards"

These words actually brought just the smallest hint of a smile back to Charlie Brown's face, and for the first time since he'd been plunged into his mind he felt a sense of hope. And Joe Agate couldn't be more furious at this.

Floating up to the side of the spirit, Joe got up in his face and said "Oh please. I mean sure, they're all very good at acting like they care when they want to, but have you actually seen for yourself how they act around him normally?! If you asked them truthfully, they'd all admit Charlie Brown's nothing more than a nuisance to them!"

To Charlie Brown's surprise Sparky actually gave a smug smirk at that response.

"You must be getting desperate Joe" Sparky laughed, Joe gritted his teeth at him "Well then, why don't we ask the children how they feel?"

Charlie Brown was uncertain what Sparky meant. His attention was caught by another light that seemed to be shining to the left of him. He turned to see the pearly white form of Schroeder standing before him. But unlike the memories that had been shown to him thus far, this apparition appeared as self aware as Sparky or Joe. And Charlie Brown realised that Sparky had somehow brought Schroeder into his mind.

"Charlie Brown, I don't know what's been said and done in here, but I just want to tell you how I feel" The real Schroeder began "You are a good person, the kindest and humblest of us all. I know you're a terrible manager and all that, but I still respect you, even look up to your ability to pull yourself up after everything that goes wrong. You're a true and loyal friend, and lately I feel like I just haven't been doing enough to support you. I owe a lot to you after all, you introduced me to the piano and brought a lot of joy to my life. I know there are times I haven't stood up for you when I should have, which is why I'm saying now, don't give up! You can't let Agate get you down, you're a better man than he'll ever be! I know you can snap out of whatever trance he's put you in, I know it"

Joe lunged forward and punched Schroeder's pearly white form, making him fade away.

"Like I said before, he's only trying to encourage you in an effort to save his own skin!" Joe roared. Charlie Brown looked down, pondering over Schroeder's words and what Joe was offering him. He looked up and narrowed his eyes at the shadow boy.

"No" Charlie Brown breathed, Joe's eyes widened "No, I felt it... he was telling the truth. He does believe in me"

It was evident from the look on Joe's face that he was starting to get worried. Sparky however was looking very pleased with this progression, and called forth next the apparition of Lucy.

"Charlie Brown, I sure hope this is getting through to you, because there's a lot I need to tell you" Lucy began, Charlie Brown had never seen her look so remorseful "I know I treat you badly, I know I put you through more grief than anyone else in your life. I've been real spiteful to you, giving you substandard psychiatry, punching you when

I get mad, ordering you around and making fun of you, and of course that silly old football gag. Well... I've been thinking over it a lot since yesterday, and I finally realise just how horrible it all is. Because I do care about you Charlie Brown-I really do care. You were the first friend I had, when we were little you showed me all about the world, you looked out for me more than my own parents. And throughout the rest of my life you've always been there, even when I was being crabby you were always there to support me, always there to be my friend. And I've never showed you that same level of respect. But I really should"

Lucy put her hands together over her heart, looking into Charlie Brown's eyes with true tenderness and a great heaping sense of remorse "I'm so sorry Charlie Brown. I know words alone can't make up for it but... in case I never get another chance to say this to you, I really am sorry for all the mean things I've done to you. I really wish you didn't have to go off and be the Guardian of Light, because I feel I'll never be able to make up for all of it. Because believe it or not Charlie Brown, you're the best friend I have. You're honest, you're loyal, and even though you never lead us to victory at baseball I still think you're the greatest manager ever. You're a good man Charlie Brown, and maybe I don't deserve to be your friend. But that doesn't matter now, what matters is that you pull through this. I believe in you Charlie Brown, I know I've never shown faith in you before but this time I really do believe you can succeed. And I promise, on my life, that when you wake up, I'm going to hold a football for you to kick, and I am NOT going to pull it away. I promise never to pull the football away again!"

As soon as Lucy was done making her promise her body started to slowly fade away. Charlie Brown watched the raven haired girl disappear with a look of amazement, as though everything she said had brought him great inner happiness. Of course Joe was quick to appear by his side and deny everything.

"Um, hello, are you really falling for this garbage?! What have I just been telling you these last twenty minutes or so? She-is-LYING! Sure, she says she feels remorse, but she's only telling you that to spare her the guilt if she doesn't. She's not being sincere about it. It's all a bluff!" Joe furiously spat in Charlie Brown's face. Charlie Brown put a finger to his chin, giving Joe a thoughtful look.

"If that were true, then why did everthing she say make sense?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Because she's crafty! Lucy is a crafty little witch who knows how to manipulate people! I mean, open your eyes man, you've known her long enough by now to know she's a lying, hypocritical, self-centred bitch who doesn't give a damn about other peoples feelings!" Joe yelled at Charlie Brown. He was shocked to see the young Guardian glare back at him.

"And if you'd known Lucy as long as I have, you'd know for all her faults she does have a tender, caring side. Just ask Rerun" Charlie Brown replied. Joe was shocked and terrified by Charlie Brown's sudden defiance, this was not at all how things were supposed to be going. He had to do something. Joe had to act fast, or this whole plan was going to go to hell.

"And what of... Violet" Joe said in a stroke of inspiration. Charlie Brown's frown vanished and he looked uneasy, making Joe grin wickedly "Yeah. Even if you think Lucy's telling the truth about feeling sorry and that she does actually care, you can't tell me Violet would honestly feel that way. She's spent the last five years doing nothing but bemoan you! Every day she rants about what a loser you are, every day of every year she goes out of her way to make you feel miserable. Sure, she sometimes acts nice and still plays for your baseball team, but she obviously doesn't have the slightest bit of appreciation for you"

Charlie Brown looked down sadly at his feet at that. He didn't know how he could possibly argue with that. Joe laughed viciously.

"See Brown, she doesn't care. Just like none of them really, honestly care about you! Violet hasn't even properly considered you a friend in years, and neither has Patty or any of the others!" Joe bellowed at the saddened Charlie Brown before turning smugly to Sparky "What do you got to say to that?"

Sparky smiled "I say we ask her opinion aswell"

Before Joe could react Sparky leapt at him and pinned him down to the ground, while nearby an apparition of Violet sprang up. Charlie Brown looked up at her, noticing she had much the same look as Lucy.

"Charlie Brown, I... I really don't know how to say this, but I'm sorry too. I mean I'm really sorry. I know I treat you like dirt, worse than that even. These past few years I feel our relationship has deteriorated completely, and I really feel horrible about that. You were my best friend Charlie Brown, back in the days where it was just us, Shermy and Patty I really looked up to you. Though you could be annoying, you were still the best friend I could have asked for. I really don't know what went wrong, but as time went by I just became a real witch to you. I know that was wrong of me, and I can never tell you just how sorry I am for it. The truth is, I think I was just jealous... after Linus and Lucy came along you started making loads of new friends, and we started spending considerably less time together because of it. And that made me sad and jealous, I liked spending time with you, and with all those new friends I thought I was getting slowly shoved out of your life. So I took out my feelings by ridiculing you and making you feel pathetic. Selfish, huh?"

From behind Charlie Brown, Joe was struggling to break free of Sparky's grip to put a stop to Violet's speech, but with him unable to slip free Violet continued "There's no good excuse for how I've treated you Charlie Brown, but that's all I got. And it pains me to think that the way I started treating and thinking of you is what really drove us apart. You're a really good, caring person. Sure you may have your faults, but when it comes to heart you're a way better person than I am... yeah, it does feel funny for me to say that, but it's the truth. I have many regrets, and I wish I had the time to make it up to you. I know I probably won't, with all this Guardian business, but I just want you to know I really do care. I want you to know that from now on, I'll be here for you Charlie Brown. No more insults, no more cruel tricks. And when you're done saving the world I'll throw you the biggest victory party ever"

Charlie Brown looked on in amazement as Violet leaned forward and put

a ghostly hand on his shoulder "I understand if you don't believe me, or just simply don't forgive me. I wouldn't expect you too, with all the grief I've put you through. But I had to tell you the truth before you left" Violet pulled back her hand and gave Charlie Brown a look of encouragement "Now toughen up Charlie Brown, I know you can make it out of this. You can beat Agate, just believe in yourself. Believe in yourself like I believe in you"

Charlie Brown watched as Violet slowly faded away, looking genuinely surprised but incredibly happy at everything she had just said.

"Oh come on now" Charlie Brown turned around to find that Joe had freed himself and was floating with his arms folded "Is this gonna be the routine now mutt, are you going to just bring everyone here into Charlie Brown's mind so they can lie to him like this? And are you going to just keep eating it up, Charlie Brown? Open your eyes man, you can tell there wasn't a hint of sincerity in her from a mile away!"

Sparky floated passed Joe and huffed "Or perhaps that is just how you see it, since you clearly have no good left in you"

Joe growled at the canine spirit and turned furiously on Charlie Brown "And I don't see how you're so happy now, a moment ago you were wallowing in your usual pit of misery. So what, a little false kindness and you're A-Ok? I mean, seriously!"

Charlie Brown looked down at his feet, his expression uncertain. Clearly despite the relief his friends apparitions had brought him, there was still plenty of doubt left in the boy. Sparky knew he would have to fix that.

With a wave of his hand Sparky crafted several chains of light from Charlie Brown's subconscious and sent them forth to restrain Joe. The darkness weilder could do nothing but shout and curse as the chains dragged him off and out of sight. Charlie Brown watched curiously as Sparky floated down behind him.

"Now then, since we've got a moment away from Joe why don't we pick up the pace a bit? It's not like your friends will get much chance to express their thoughts after this is all over and we have to depart, after all" Sparky said in a conversational tone. Charlie Brown watched as Sparky snapped his fingers. His attention was then diverted to a light at the other side of him, forming into the shape of Marcie.

"Hi Charles, can you hear me? I hope this message gets through to you, Sparky says it will but I've never tried talking to someone inside their own mind before, so I can't be sure. Anyway, I want to say that Sparky's right, we do care about you. And why shouldn't we Charles, you're a swell guy. You may not be the bravest person in the world, you may not be the toughest or the smartest person I've ever known. But Charles, you're the best" Marcie's apparition spoke, and on her face was an expression that Charlie brown couldn't help but think of as admiration "I don't care whether you're a winner or a loser, I like being your friend Charles because you're so thoughtful and giving. I'm sure Sparky's already covered this, but I'll say it again, don't listen to anything that creep Joe tells you. You're not a failure. A failure would give up after one bad day and never try to do good at anything again, but that's not you. You always try your

best at everything, and you do have a lot of talents. I couldn't nearly keep up with you during the decathlon, and I'm sure you would have won it if you'd been paying attention. Ok, maybe that's not the best example, but I think my point is clear. For all the times you lose, you always pick yourself up and try again. And I think that's really inspiring Charles. So don't doubt yourself, ok"

The ends of Charlie Brown's lips began to curve into the first hint of a smile as Marcie spoke, before she finally vanished and Sally appeared to his left.

"Hi big brother. I'm speaking to you from outside your head. Weird huh?" Sally said with all her usual childish innocence. Charlie Brown chuckled slightly to himself as Sally spoke her part "Big brother, don't feel down. You've got nothing to feel bad about. If anyone should be feeling upset with themselves, it should be me"

Charlie Brown rose an eyebrow at this comment as Sally elaborated "You know, sometimes I think I really don't deserve a big brother like you. I mean, sure, I'm not as bad as SOME little sisters I know, but I don't always treat you with a lot of respect... Well, hardly any respect at all really. And that's just me being the silly person I am, I sometimes overlook things that I should pay more attention to. And one of those things is you. You're always there for me when I really need you, every time I need a shoulder to cry on or something like that. But when was the last time I did that to you? I dunno. I remember when you lost that spelling bee and locked yourself in your room, I never once thought to try and cheer you up. I didn't think about it at the time, but now I realise that was real selfish. It wouldn't be so bad if it were only that one time, but I'm always taking you for granted. And you wanna know the really worst part? Now that I realise it I don't have time to make it up to you. After you're done beating up Joe Agate you'll be going off to fight some intergalactic war, and I might never see you again" Sally's voice trailed off as her spiritual form looked sadly at the floor "You can't tell how empty that makes me feel inside"

Charlie Brown watched his sister's form with a sympathetic look as a pearly white tear slid down her face. He lifted a hand to her semi-translucent face and wiped the tear away. She looked up at him as their eyes met.

"I will be back Sally. I'd never go away forever. And you don't have to feel so bad. You're my little sister, you're supposed to be annoying sometimes. And I know this sounds silly coming from me, but you're being too hard on yourself. You're a great sister" Charlie Brown told her honestly, and Sally's eyes face lit up.

"Thank you big brother" Sally said, drying her eyes "I'll stay out of your room until you get back, I promise"

Sally's illusion faded away shortly after, while one of Peppermint Patty popped up.

"Hey Chuck, how you feeling?" Peppermint Patty asked in the closest thing to a conversational tone any of his friends had used so far. Charlie Brown couldn't help but inwardly chuckle at her forwardness.

"Oh, not so bad. A bit weirded out by all this, but I'm not feeling

quite so down on myself now" Charlie Brown replied honestly. Peppermint Patty chuckled.

"Great to hear it Chuck" Peppermint Patty said. After a moment silence she continued "Well, guess as long as I'm here I better say my part. Let's see, where to begin?"

Peppermint Patty's ghostly form paced around Charlie Brown's mindscape for a moment, a thoughtful look on her face. After half a minute of this routine she stopped and shook her head "Well, I'm guessing everyone from Lucy to Violet has said everything that really needs to be said, so let me just say, I always believed in you Chuck. For all the times I've teased you about being a bad baseball player or whatever, truth is I always knew there was a lot of potential in you. Before all this Guardian stuff started no one would have believed me, but I knew from day one you were someone special Chuck. You always give it your all at everything, and even though everyone treats you like dirt, you never let that get you down for very long. You just get up and try again. Agate may call that stupidity, but you know what I call it Chuck? Inspirational"

"Inspirational?" Charlie Brown wondered, to which Peppermint Patty elaborated.

"Yeah, inspirational. You see Chuck, now you're probably not going to believe this, but I wasn't always so confident about myself either" Charlie Brown could only stare in disbelief at Patty's comment.

"You? Since when?" Charlie Brown asked.

"For a long time before I met you actually" Peppermint Patty replied sadly "You know, half the time my childhood was a pretty crummy time for me. I got lousy grades in school, the other kids made fun of me for looking like a boy, and..." Patty paused for a minute, not sure if she should continue. But then she realized she had to share her burden, get it off her chest "I'm sure most of you realize I don't have a mom. Well that's because she died while I was very little. Ya see, my mom had some health issues just before she got pregnant with me. When I was born it nearly killed her, and even after that it left her pretty work. She couldn't work anymore, so she spent the next three years between home and the hospital, spending most of her time looking after me. Then one day, I can hardly remember most of it, but mom was going into hospital and she looked worse than she usually did. She didn't come back for a while. Then one day my dad came home, and he said mommy wasn't coming back. he tried to explain to me about death, but I was too young to understand it, and I just wanted mom to come home. I just couldn't believe that the woman who'd loved and cared for me for all my life up until then was gone..."

Charlie Brown had never seen Peppermint Patty look more sad and depressed than she did now. The look on her face, he realized, was very much like the look he would wear when he was at his most depressed. For a moment there was silence between the two of them, Charlie Brown wanted to say something, but no words came out of his mouth. When he was about to give a word of comfort, Peppermint Patty finally continued.

"So yeah, things don't go well for me either. It didn't help the next few years that my dad worked a lot, and sometimes even had to leave

me at home on my own all night while he was working. For the longest time I could remember, I just felt so alone. But I didn't want to show it, I never really wanted people to think I was just some miserable little kid that no one would want to know-that's not a comparison, don't think of it like that-so I tried to act like everything was alright. I let me feelings go, ran around like an goofball and had fun. I realised I was pretty good at baseball, so I mostly used that to distract me from how I felt. But before I met you, I didn't really have that many friends" Peppermint Patty, who had been looking at the floor for most of that last exchange, finally looked up at Charlie Brown, and a small smile spread over her face "But when I did meet you, that's when everything changed"

Charlie Brown, as per usual, was confused. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you changed the way I felt about myself Chuck" Patty replied "At first we only really saw each other to play baseball, and since you were pretty bad at that I didn't really think much of you at the time. But at the same time, I saw something else in you. And I wanted to get to know you more outside of baseball. As we started to hang out more, I started seeing a lot more of myself in you. You always had it pretty rough too, everyone was always mad at you for some silly reason and you never seemed to win anything. But, and I know this is starting to sound really repetitive but it needs to be said, you never quit. You always tried and tried and tried some more to do good at things, and you never let petty arguments stop you from being friends in people. There was just this quiet determination in you that spoke to me in a lot of ways, and I think that's what made us such close friends. Over time, as we started seeing each other practically every day, I started to forget about all the crummy stuff that happened to me, and after a while I even started to feel good about myself. Through you and everyone else I had a whole lot of friends now, playing with your team was what inspired me to create my own winning baseball team, and that's brought me a lot of recognition. And, well, basically just by knowing you, you made my life a whole lot better Chuck"

"You made me see the good in myself, that no matter how hard things get I shouldn't give up, and it was worth always trying. I guess it worked a little better for me than it did you in a lot of things, huh? But if I'd never met you, I don't know what I would have turned out like. Truth is, I owe everything to you Chuck. And what have I done to show it? I yell at you like a drill sergeant, make you feel awkward and I really don't think I make an effort to make you feel good about yourself. Which is what I should have been doing, since you did just that for me. Forget everything Agate's told you Chuck, you are a great, amazing person. And I know you'll make the perfect Guardian, because you're an inspiration to us all, you set an example of what we should all be like at heart. And if you can make me feel good about myself, you can more than easily save the universe, especially if the worst you have to contend with is that arrogant brat. I mean, what has he got to show for himself anyway, for a so called loser you've got way more friends than that creep will ever have" Peppermint Patty emphasised that last part, and something inside Charlie Brown clicked at that thought.

"You know, Patty... you may have a very good point there..."

"Of course I've got a point Chuck! Now quit moping around in here, you've still got Joe's butt to kick, and a lot of apologies to

accept. Trust me Chuck, it'll all turn out alright" Peppermint Patty's voice rang with confidence as she said that. When she was done speaking Sparky floated past, stopping just to the left of her.

"Now, before I let you leave Patricia, is there anything _else_ you'd like to let him know?" Sparky asked smoothly. Charlie Brown was astounded by the huge blush that spread across Peppermint Patty's face at those words, he wondered for a moment what was wrong with her. Patty began to mutter and splutter like mad, she sounded even worse than Charlie Brown whenever he did try to get anywhere near the Little Red Haired Girl. When she noticed he was looking right at her the stuttering became even worse.

"Well, I-I-I... uh, um, er... I-um, well... I g-guess... um" She took a deep breath and continued, though still extremely nervous "Well I... this-this isn't easy for me to say Chuck... I mean, really isn't... I... well you see, I... I... well I... kinda... well, I... maybe... l-l... I sort of... I..." Peppermint Patty twirled her fingers nervously. Finally she stomped hard on the ground and groaned loudly "Aw screw it! Chuck, I lo-"

But, tragically, Patty was never allowed to finish her confession, for at that moment Joe Agate's solid form suddenly swooped down and smashed Patty's echo out of existence. Charlie Brown stumbled back in shock as Joe got up and looked furiously at Charlie Brown.

"That's quite enough I think!" Joe yelled, desperation and fear evident through his forced menace "If she really meant any of that, she would have told you years ago. They ALL would have. There isn't a word of truth in anything those blockheads have said, it's all just something they've come up with now to trick you, to save their own lives and avoid the risk of you getting back at them for all the abuse they've piled on you if you decide to go rouge. Why won't you just listen to me, why do you believe them! Why do you even consider listening to what they have to say after all you've been through? It makes no sense! You're not a guardian, you're just some undeserving snot who got these powers by accident. You're not a hero, you're just some annoying little worm who belongs among the amoebas. AND FOR THE LAST F###ING TIME. THEY. HATE. YOU!"

Charlie Brown looked to the black floor, his expression completely hidden. Sparky looked on in wonder, unsure whether he should be worried or not. Above Charlie Brown Joe seethed, forming a dark dagger in his hand with the intention to just stab Charlie Brown while he was distracted. He lifted the weapon up and prepared to strike Charlie Brown in the head. Sparky called out... but there was no need. The instant before the dagger came down into Charlie Brown's brain, his hand shot up and grabbed Joe's wrist, holding it back, though he did not take his face away from the floor. Joe struggled for a moment to pull his hand free.

"Joe... just shut up!"

Agate was momentarily shocked by the response. And he was even more shocked, and reasonably terrified when Charlie Brown's body was covered by a glorious glowing light, and he raised his head to reveal a look of defiance on his face. Charlie Brown released his grip on Joe's hand, making the dark boy stumble for a moment, before Brown struck Joe in the chest with a palm strike, sending him flying back a

dozen feet. Joe tried to steady himself, only to see Charlie Brown determinedly marching towards him.

"I've heard enough Joe, and I've had enough. You don't know my friends, and you don't know me. So just shut up!" Charlie Brown spoke in a voice so confident that nobody would have at first believed it to be his. Agate began to back away fearfully, only to find himself up against some sort of invisible wall as Charlie Brown got closer to him.

"You say they don't care, that this is all an act on their part. But no one would go through all this trouble if that were true. You say I'm not meant to be the Guardian of Light, that this power was meant for someone else. Well, I agree with you, I wish this power had gone to someone else, but the fact is it chose me. And there has to be a purpose to that. I've already decided that no matter how strange or not right this whole thing may feel to me, I would do my best as a Guardian. So I won't be put down about that"

Charlie Brown was now merely steps away from Joe. The Agate boy channelled some darkness to his fist and prepared to punch at his nemesis, only for Charlie Brown to block the attack and push Joe back against the wall, holding him up by his neck.

"And anyway, even if there was the slightest truth in everything you've said, Peppermint Patty's got a point. Why should I listen to you?! You're more likely to lie to me than anyone else I know, that's practically your whole life lying and manipulating people. And you know what, I just realized, that part where you showed me Marcie saying I wasn't worth her time? She never said that! You just randomly spliced things she'd said together to make it look like she'd said it. How many other so called "memories" did you show me that were made up?!"

Joe did not reply, but the look in his eyes was all the answer Charlie Brown needed.

"I may be a blockhead. I may be a loser, a geek, and a failure face. But I don't care. None of that really matters, what matters is that I'm now responsible for looking after everyone in this universe. and I REFUSE to fail at that too. You can ridicule me all you want Agate, but I've just decided, I don't care anymore. Because I am the Guardian, I am Charlie Brown, and no one can take that away from me. Especially not you! Now do me a favour. Get-out-of my-HEAD!"

The light surrounding Charlie Brown's mental form escalated to blinding levels. As it grew the light engulfed Agate, whose scream echoed as the light filled all of Charlie Brown's mindscape. Sparky smiled victoriously before he too vanished into the light.

* * *

><p>The Peanuts gang stood over their unconscious friend, anxiously awaiting some sort of reaction. Up until now Charlie Brown had remained completely immobile, and the kids weren't sure how much of an effect their telepathic messages were having. Nervously they waited, praying Charlie Brown would be able to overcome Joe's evil influence and pull through.<p>

And then, in the blink of an eye, it happened.

One second Charlie Brown remained unconscious. Then the very next second, his entire body began glowing a brilliant, blinding light. The Peanuts covered their eyes, unable to look at such brightness. But what they could see was a shadowy mist rising into the air, and they could hear Joe's pain-filled screams as the dark warrior was expelled from Charlie Brown's body.

The dark mist gathered over to where the Dark followers were standing, slowly morphing back into Joe. Immediately after taking form the villain placed a hand to his throbbing forehead and collapsed on his knees. The villains gathered around him in worry as Thibault and Eggman tried helping him up.

"What the hell happened?" Thibault immediately demanded. Joe swatted him and the evil scientist away. His vision at first blurry, Joe quickly regained his sight and turned to Charlie Brown. Joe's eyes widened in shock... and horror.

No longer unconscious, Charlie Brown was now floating above the ground, a massive aura of golden light blazing around him. The heroes eyes shot open, and a smile spread over his face. To the shock and amazement of not only Joe, but everyone else who saw him, Charlie Brown was smiling at his archenemy, looking more confident and sure of himself than he had ever been in his life.

Joe got to his feet and backed away nervously, fear overcoming him as he watched Charlie Brown float in place with that brilliant aura of light. In mere seconds the various cuts and bruises that adorned Charlie Brown's body vanished as he was completely healed, a far sight better than the still battered Joe.

Charlie Brown looked back to his friends. They smiled at him, glad to see their messages had gotten through to him. Charlie Brown smiled appreciatively at every single one of them. Floating a few feet behind him, Sparky watched on in pride for his successor.

"Thanks guys" Charlie Brown said with sincerity. His friends smiled wider as Lucy waved her hand.

"Just finish him off already" Lucy said encouragingly. Charlie Brown chuckled at her choice of words and turned to Joe with a look of authority.

"It's over Joe. You have no choice but to surrender" Charlie Brown declared. Joe stared fearfully at Charlie Brown. He knew he hadn't a chance now, but Joe still refused to accept defeat.

"In your dreams Brown! I'll fight you to the death!" Joe roared. Joe rose into the air, stretching out his arms and summoning forth the power of the shadows. Knowing full well he would need every last ounce of dark power he could reach, Joe called forth every remaining shadow in Birchwood, and every small ounce of darkness within ten miles of his surrounding area. The darkness surrounded Joe, creating a large shadowy aura around himself as every one of his injuries healed.

Charlie Brown simply watched as Joe summoned forth the darkness. His friends, until now simply in awe at his power, now looked at Charlie Brown with expressions of growing worry.

"Well what are you waiting for? Finish him now before it's too late!" Violet yelled urgently. Charlie Brown shook his head, still smiling.

"No, I think I'll let him have his fun" Charlie Brown replied. To the bemused looks of his friends, he added "Trust me, I know what I'm doing"

Up in the air Joe finished drawing forth all the shadows within his reach. Completely regenerated and his powers engourging, Joe looked down at Charlie Brown under his nose and hovered downwards. He flared his dark aura around him, trying to look as threatening as possible. It enraged Joe that Charlie Brown still looked calm and collected.

"You're right about one thing Brown, this battle does end here. But no, I will not surrender. I swear I'll just kill you where you stand!" Joe roared. Joe channelled his entire dark aura into his hands and fired a mighty shadow beam at Charlie Brown. The Light Guardian, completely relaxed, simply lifted one hand and covered it in light. The shadow beam collided with Charlie Brown's glowing hand, but as it struck it split off into several more beams firing in several directions up and down, none of them touching Charlie Brown.

The students gasped in shock at this development. Joe disperced the beam in shock over how easily Charlie Brown had blocked it. The now confident hero grinned again.

"Are you done yet?" Charlie Brown called. Joe spluttered, unable to comprehend what just happened. Finally he growled and furiously flew at his enemy. Joe launched several rapid punches at Charlie Brown, but the hero blocked them all with ease. The Peanuts watched in amazement as Charlie Brown continuously blocked Joe's attacks with minimal effort. After a full thirty seconds of just blocking, Charlie Brown decided he might as well fight back and grabbed Joe's right fist, squeezing it tightly.

VERY tightly it seemed, as Joe let out an agonising scream as Charlie Brown effortlessly crushed his hand. A few seconds later Charlie Brown released his grip, gave Joe two seconds to shake the pain out of his hand then sent him flying with a powerful light punch to the face.

Joe crashed hard into the fence. He spent the next few seconds reeling from the attack. Unable to believe the force in which he had been slugged, Joe got up and flew at Charlie Brown, forming a dark blade in his right hand. Joe reached Charlie Brown and prepared to slice him in half. But Brown blocked the attack... with a sword made of light!

Joe widened his eyes at the light blade Charlie Brown had formed. Charlie Brown smirked at his bemusement and motioned him to continue. Joe glared at his foe and began striking rapidly with the blade. Charlie Brown blocked the strikes with his own weapon just as easily as he blocked Joe's punches. When he finally swung back, Charlie Brown's sword sliced Joe's sword of darkness in half at once. While Joe was stunned by what had happened, Charlie Brown quickly reconfigured the light sword into a sphere and blasted Joe with

it.

Joe Agate flew twenty feet into the air from the force of that attack. Staring down with disbelief and silent rage, Joe channelled energy to each of his hands and tossed two spheres of darkness down at Brown, who blocked them both with a light shield. A light shield, might I had, that looked twice as thick as any of those he had previously formed.

Losing himself in a rage, Joe began pelting Charlie Brown's barrier with dozens of dark spheres. He rounded off this series of attack with a mighty dark beam. But still, Charlie Brown's shield would not shatter. As a matter of fact there were very few cracks in it. Joe, his anger reaching boiling point, screamed out his rage and dived at Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown lowered his shield and flew up to confront Joe.

Joe threw another punch at Charlie Brown, who simply grabbed his fist. Joe tried punching Charlie Brown with his other hand, but Charlie Brown grabbed that too. The dark warrior struggled to pull free as Charlie Brown smiled directly to his face.

"You sure you want to keep this up Joe, we can call it quits anytime you like" Charlie Brown offered. Joe growled and prepared to headbutt the Light Guardian, who did the exact same thing. Their heads clashed and Charlie Brown and Joe Agate fell to the ground, on their feet but in a daze. This time around Charlie Brown recovered first and blasted Joe with a light beam, sending him crashing into the mountain of rubble that once was Birchwood Middle School.

The students stared in shock at Charlie Brown. It was just inconceivable to them that he could go from battered and bruised, then unconscious, to being this unimaginably powerful. That didn't stop the Peanuts and other good students from being very happy at his astounding progress though. And for the Dark Followers, now they were REALLY starting to worry.

Charlie Brown stared at the ruins of the school for any sign of Joe. Finally, he noticed a few rocks shaking, and moments later Joe tore his way back to the surface. The battered warrior of darkness panted heavily, looking over to Charlie Brown with pure rage.

"How is this happening?!" Joe yelled, glaring with full fury at the Guardian "How can you possibly have gotten this strong so fast?!" Charlie Brown just gave Joe a sly grin.

"Well, I owe it all to you and your little mind trick. You almost convinced me to give up for a moment there, but Sparky and my friends showed me I really am appreciated. Thanks to your stunt, I finally realize that I'm not as pathetic as I always thought I was" Charlie Brown explained "I mean, I'm still a blockhead, but despite that my friends have still stuck by me all these years, still came to support me here despite that they were risking their lives. And you know what... for the first time in a long while, I feel... happy. Completely happy. No doubts, no insecurities. For the first time since I was four years old, I feel genuinely good about myself, knowing that I am actually liked"

The Peanuts looked on at Charlie Brown with proud smiles. It genuinely warmed all of their hearts to know that simply telling

Charlie Brown how they felt had done him all this good. Over in the crumbling school, Joe was besides himself with anger at his own failure, and the Witch for suggesting that stupid technique.

"Just my luck, I try to kill a guy and I end up making his life better. Grr!" Joe growled. The darkness weilder got up and flew at Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown got into a fighting stance, but was caught off guard as Joe instantly vanished from sight. Joe reappeared momentarily behind him, striking Charlie Brown in the back with a powerful darkness-infused kick. Charlie Brown was pushed onto the ground. He flipped around to face Joe, but was blasted in the face by a dark beam. Joe followed up this attack by assaulting Charlie Brown with a barrage of dark spheres.

As clouds of dust formed to shield Charlie Brown from sight, Joe grinned with sadistic pleasure, thinking he had dealt some serious damage to his enemy with that attack. So you can imagine how disappointed he was when the dust settled and Charlie Brown appeared to only be suffering mild injuries, which healed up nearly instantaneously with his healing powers anyway.

Charlie Brown looked up at Joe and smirked. Joe frowned and leapt forward to punch him out, but Charlie Brown was too quick. He leapt past Joe and grabbed him by the arm, throwing him into the air. Joe steadied himself in the sky, only to be knocked out of the air again by a light sphere, making him crash into the ground. As Joe struggled to get up, Charlie Brown looked at him with an expression of understanding.

"You know what else I realized when you were in my mind?" Charlie Brown asked the downed Agate. Joe glared suspiciously, but motioned for him to continue anyway "I figured out the real reason you hate me so much"

Joe snorted, not impressed by this supposed "Realization"

"It's not that hard to figure out, you're the blockhead that put a dent in my reputation and I want revenge" Joe shot back. But Charlie Brown shook his head.

"It's more than that Joe, isn't it" Charlie Brown said knowingly, and Joe tensed up a bit "Ever since I saw you declare how you wanted to kill me on those television sets, I couldn't help thinking that a game of marbles was hardly a good enough reason for anyone to want to commit murder. I know I also kind of made you a laughing stock, but still, your motives just seemed a little far fetched. Surely there had to be more to it than that. And there is, isn't there"

Joe continued to glare at Charlie Brown, he seemed almost worried about what he was about to say. The students were all listening closely to Charlie Brown's little speech too, wondering what he considered to be Joe's true intentions.

"You see, though I've been too oblivious and wishy washy to realize it until now, I have a great life. I have two loving parents, a little sister who looks up to me, even when she nags, a loyal dog and a whole bunch of great friends. I might not have a perfect life, but I do have everything I need to be happy" Charlie Brown explained. Everyone thought he was going off topic for a moment, before he looked down at Joe with a surprisingly sympathetic look "But you..."

you don't have anything like that, do you?"

This comment seemed to anger Joe more than anything. All the other students stared questionably at the Guardian.

"Though you go on and on about what a worthless excuse for a human being I am, the actual truth is that you wish you could have what I have" Charlie Brown said wisely "You may think being a bully gains you respect, but the truth is everybody hates you a lot more than they could ever hate me because of how you act. And you don't have family like me, we've all heard about what an abusive jerk your dad is, and that you don't have a mother. And you don't even have many friends either. The closest you have is Thibault, and even him you consider more of a cronie to help with your bullying. Though you refuse to admit it, perhaps not even to yourself, the reality is you wish you could have my sort of life" Joe's anger seemed to be at it's peak as Charlie Brown finally revealed the full reason the bully hated him "You hate me... because you're jealous of me"

Everyone, from the Peanuts, to the Dark Followers, to Sparky and even the Witch's reflection in the mirror were stunned speechless by Charlie Brown's claim. And Joe, his temper seemed to finally explode out of him.

"JEALOUS!?" Joe screamed in a primal rage "OF YOU!? HA! Don't make me laugh! Who could ever be jealous of you! You're stupid, ugly, pathetic and the biggest sack of crap in the universe! I COULD NEVER BE JEALOUS OF YOU!"

Charlie Brown shook his head, looking almost whistfully at the fuming villain.

"If you choose to deny it then that's alright. I won't try to persuade you otherwise, it's just not worth my time. But it is the truth Joe, and one day you're going to have to accept it. And you should be able to realize it. I mean, if I of all people can figure that out, then it must be the truth" Charlie Brown said simply. Joe snarled.

"Oh whatever! Just stop talking!" Joe yelled, floating up from the rubble of the school and rocketing towards Charlie Brown. The hero sighed, wishing Joe would just feel remorse and end this peacefully. Joe reached where Charlie Brown was flying and threw a dozen punches at him. Charlie Brown of course was able to block them easily and struck back with his own barage of punches. When Charlie Brown was through Joe was left looking a lot more like he did before recharging.

Joe held his chest, gasping in pain, and aimed another shot at Charlie Brown. Deciding this fight had gone on long enough Charlie Brown dodged the punch and blasted Joe in the chest with a light sphere. Joe crashed into the ground and rolled five feet. Joe shook off the attack and looked up, only to see Charlie Brown firing a light beam at him. Joe gasped and leapt back out of the way, though the resulting explosion from the beam hitting the ground sent him flying back over the rubble.

Over with the Dark Followers, the kids were in a panic. Most were already thinking about making a break for the crowd of kids on the other side, but too worried Joe might see them and blast them to

smiththerines. Only Thibault was still supportive of Joe, yelling for him to "Break his neck already". Eggman however was a lot smarter than Thibault and knew this battle was indeed a lost cause.

"My boy, you can't keep this up! I think it would be wise to make a tactical retreat!" Eggman yelled to the leader. Joe sent Eggman a dirty glare.

"You mean run away?" Joe asked pointedly.

"Exactly!" Eggman yelled urgently. Joe scoffed at him.

"No way!"

"Listen to the fat man Joe!" The Witch's voice commanded, and Eggman held up the mirror so her reflection could have a better look at Joe "Our mental assault has backfired, and caused him to unlock a greater portion of his inner potential. At your current level of control over your powers you're no match for him! Retreat now or you'll lose everything!"

Joe glared at the Witch in the mirror. He looked to Charlie Brown, contemplating. This battle was getting a little uneven. It may be wise to just get out while he could... but no. NO. He would never let Charlie Brown have the satisfaction of running him off. He would not surrender, he would NOT lose to Charlie Brown!

So defying the orders of his superior and Eggman, Joe floated high up into the air. Charlie brown prepared to fly after him, but Joe launched a dark sphere into his eyes. Temporarily blinded, Charlie Brown was then subjected to a dark beam that sent him crashing into the ground. It didn't hurt too much, but it gave Joe enough time to rise up into the sky, beyond the clouds and far out of sight. Joe flew until he had reached the atmosphere. It was too cold for him to continue any further, but this position was suitable.

With his only thought being how much he wanted to kill Charlie Brown, Joe raised his arms and prepared to summon forth the greatest darkness of all. The endless blackness of space!

Joe summoned forth all the darkness he could, absorbing it into his body. Into his soul. His dark aura flaring like mad, Joe's injuries healed and his eyes reddened. With a nasty grin, Joe finished absorbing the power of space and began slowly lowering himself down to earth.

Back on the ground Charlie Brown was shaking off his earlier attack and scanning the skies for any sign of Joe.

"Coward must have taken Eggheads advice and ran away" Peppermint Patty summarised nearby "Ha, I knew he was a wimp"

"Don't be so sure Patty" Sparky said, also scanning the skies for Joe "If he had wanted to retreat he would have summoned a portal to the realm of darkness. No... he's planning something. I just don't know what"

Everyone waited anxiously for what was to come. They all looked up to the skies, to the point Joe had vanished past the clouds. Charlie Brown in particular squinted his eyes, readying himself for whatever

Joe had in store.

After an eternity of waiting, the clouds began to darken. Every cloud in the sky, up until now white and fluffy, turned dark and stormy. Thunder echoed from the skies as an exceptionally dark shape formed at the heart of the clouds. Charlie Brown tightened his fists, watching as Joe Agate emerged. His aura was flaring as wildly as Charlie Brown's had when he awoke, and even from this distance Charlie Brown could tell he was grinning with unbrivalled confidence and malice.

"This is it Brown!" Joe's voice boomed once he was a mere thirty feet above Charlie Brown "This is the moment we've all been waiting for. It's time we bring this all to a close! It's time to do... or DIE!"

Joe channelled every last ounce of darkness he had acquired into his palms. The storm clouds swirled in sync with his attack, and black lightning struck as Joe prepared the attack that would decide this fight.

"Uh, Charlie Brown, I think now would be a very good time to-HURRY UP AND DO SOMETHING!" Lucy screamed urgently, her and everyone else terrified by what they were seeing in the sky. Charlie Brown only nodded, staring at the swirling void of darkness gathering around Joe. Focusing his mind only on his positive thoughts, on all the things Sparky had shown him in his mind, Charlie Brown summoned forth all the light inside him and channelled it into his hands. Mentally, Charlie Brown called out to every ray of light in the world. From the street light and the bulbs that lit up every house in Birchwood, to the sun that was hidden behind the swirl of dark clouds. Charlie Brown held up his hands, ready to shine this light into the face of evil.

It all happened very fast. As Joe and Charlie Brown each finished charging their attacks, the rivals each let out a scream of rage and unleashed the full might of their attacks. The beams of light and darkness, humungous in size, clashed in the air, the mere intensity of their energy struggle shaking the earth and causing the winds to spiral out in a rapid gale.

Joe pushed with everything he had, firing forth every ounce of darkness he had. His grim scowl turned into a smirk of foul pleasure as his mighty dark beam quickly started to overpower Charlie Brown's light beam.

"Yes! YES!" Joe laughed maniacally as he continued to push his darkness forward, finally ready to obliterate his enemy.

On the ground Charlie Brown seemed to struggle to keep up his attack. He was quickly starting to fall onto his knees, the intensity of Joe's beam against his seemingly overwhelming him. At that moment however Charlie Brown looked to his friends. They were all staring at him in worry, terrified he wasn't going to make it. But they still refused to give up faith.

"Come on Chuck, you can do it!" Peppermint Patty yelled, determined to see him through this "You can't let him win after all that! Show him what ol' Charles Brown is really made of!"

Her words brought a smile to Charlie Brown's face, and served to engourage the fire in his soul. Remembering who and what he was fighting for, Charlie Brown got back to his feet and stretched his arms as far as he could, putting every last ounce of power he had into his attack. His beam immediately doubled in size, pushing Joe's dark beam back to the centre position. Joe's eyes widened in shock, and they grew wider still as the light beam pushed his dark beam back even further.

Joe strained himself to keep up the attack as the beam of light reduced his own dark beam to half it's original size, rapidly making it's way to the Warrior of Darkness.

"No! NO! No, this can't be happening!" Joe yelled deleriously. His eyes saw what was happening, but his mind just couldn't.

The beam struggle grew more one-sided with each passing second. Charlie Brown continued to push forth with everything he had, but despite channelling all the darkness of space, despite putting every drop of power he had left into his own attack, Joe's dark beam was being vastly overpowered, to the point it was now only three feet in length. Joe strained every muscle in his face as he tried desparately to channel more shadows, more glorious darkness. But nothing... he could put nothing more into this attack. Joe was forced to deal with the horrifying fact that he had drawn forth all the darkness he could-and he was still losing!

"H-how! How are you doing this?! HOW ARE YOU BEATING ME!" Joe furiously demanded as Charlie Brown's attack got closer still. Charlie Brown norrowed his eyes, channelling even more power as he sternly called out to Joe his response.

"Because you only fight for yourself! All of your power comes from your hatred for me. But my power comes from love for my friends! My will to protect them, my determination to keep safe those that are precious to me safe is where I draw strength! And that is why you'll never win... because anger and hatred can never triumph over the power of friendship! It sounds cheesy, but it's the truth!" Charlie Brown declared. His beam of light had gotten so strong that it had nearly overpowered Joe completely, and the dark boy was forced to reconfigure his beam into a dark shield just to hold back the awesome might of Charlie Brown's attack. The Warrior of Darkness grew more disillusioned every second. This wasn't the end-it just couldn't be the end!

"NO! You can't win-you shouldn't win-YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO WIN!" Joe screamed in his last moments of desperation "You aren't worthy of victory! You're a failure! You're a fool! You're a wishy washy, dunderheaded, clumsy, meaningless waste of space! You're... you're... You're a blockhead!"

Back on the ground, Charlie Brown looked down at the ground, mulling over those words.

"You're right... I am a blockhead" Charlie Brown admitted. But he didn't say it with sadness, with grief, or even the smallest hint of self-pity. Charlie Brown said it with pride "I am a blockhead! And proud of it!"

Joe's shield finally cracked from the pressure, and Joe was engulfed

by the light.

"AAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUGGGGGGGHHHHH!"

Joe's screams of anguish echoed all around as the light swallowed him up. The light was so intense that it engulfed the whole town in its brightness, and was visible even from the depths of space.

After a while, silence fell. The light began to subside, and everyone's eyes slowly but surely adjusted to the reduced volume. The dark clouds had vanished in the flash, being replaced by blue skies and simple sunshine. Gasps filled the air as the students bore witness to the final outcome.

Charlie Brown was last to regain his vision. He stared up in wonder at the sky, and then his eyes slowly drifted downwards. He saw Joe on the ground. The villain was covered from head to foot in bruises and marks, his skin burning. His clothes were torn, his signature green cap being almost completely incinerated. Still somehow conscious, Joe tried to move. He struggled for a while to make even the simplest movements, but somehow despite it all he still got to his feet. Charlie Brown watched blankly as Joe struggled to stand upright. Painfully he raised his head, his face worn and a large gash across his forehead. With every fibre of his being seemingly in agony, Joe tried to step forward.

"You... I... it's not... I wo-" Joe gasped as he could hardly breathe another word. Finally the pain overcame him, and Joe fell on his face. No longer could he fight. The chosen warrior of darkness had been utterly defeated. Charlie Brown was victorious.

Charlie Brown blinked as his mind registered what he was seeing. His friends and classmates, eyes wide as dinner plates, looked from Joe's broken body to Charlie Brown standing there watching in amazement.

"Did I really just do that?" Charlie Brown wondered. For the longest time his friends simply stared in silent shock at him. Then Linus finally found the sense to speak up.

"I think Charlie Brown just won" Linus said unsurely... .. "HE WON!"

Linus leapt into the air as he cheered those wonderful words. Then all at once the Peanuts broke out in applause, followed soon after by every other student of Birchwood Junior High. Charlie Brown could still hardly register what was happening as Peppermint Patty ran forth to hug him.

"Chuck, you did it! You totally saved the day!" Peppermint Patty told him ecstatically.

"I did?" Charlie Brown asked as his mind finally started to accept what had happened, and a smile lit up his face "I really did, didn't I!"

Charlie Brown suddenly found himself swarmed by his friends as they started hugging him. Probably the first group hug the entire Peanuts gang, Snoopy and Woodstock included, had ever had. Everybody was too

happy to even care that they were getting covered in Pigpen's dust.

"You did it Charlie Brown, you beat Agate and saved the whole school" Pigpen said excitedly.

"I knew you could do it Charlie Brown! I knew it all along! You're a hero!" Rerun was cheering in comical fanboy fashion.

Charlie Brown spent the next few minutes being hugged and praised by his friends. After all the crazyness he'd just been through, it all felt really, really good. Charlie Brown's friends eventually separated so they could say their lines individually.

"Like I said Charlie Brown, you are indeed a remarkrable person" Linus said his piece first, Charlie Brown clapped hands with his best friend. Charlie Brown then felt a sharp pain in his shoulder as he turned to see Lucy had given him a friendly, but hard bump on the shoulder.

"Wait to go, you ol' blockhead" Lucy said kindly. Charlie Brown smiled at her as he nursed his shoulder, that was probably the first time anyone had used the word blockhead to describe him in a positive context.

Snoopy jumped up on his owner, giving him a good long hug which Charlie Brown returned tenderly.

"I'm so glad you're alright round he-er, Charlie Brown. Heh heh, I guess I still need to get used to thinking that" Snoopy thought with a chuckle. He released his owner and gave him a lick on the cheek before stepping back. Charlie Brown wiped the dog spit off his cheek, a little disturbed, as Marcie walked up by his side.

"That really was something Charles. I never doubted you for a second" Marcie said sweetly, then did the unexpected, or perhaps totally expected of her, and leaned forward to kiss Charlie Brown on the cheek. Charlie Brown's entire face reddened and he smiled awkwardly, scratching the back of his head. Marcie took a step back next to Peppermint Patty, who gave her an almost indignant look.

"What was _that_?" Peppermint Patty asked jealously. Marcie giggled.

"Don't be mad sir. Next time you can be the one who kisses him" Marcie's reply was actually enough to make the tomboy blush and babble incoherently. Franklin looked at Marcie, for a second he seemed put down by what had just occurred between her and Charlie Brown, but whatever it was he shrugged off as he approached Charlie Brown and patted him on the shoulder.

"I always knew you'd prove them wrong someday Charlie Brown. Great job buddy" Franklin told Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown smiled at his friend as Sally rushed up to hug him. Hug him TIGHT.

"I don't care if you won or lost, I'm just so glad you're alive" Sally said, a smile on her face and happy tears in her eyes as she squeezed him harder "Promise you'll never worry me like that again"

"I... won't... if you... just... let me... br-br-breathe" Charlie Brown gasped as his sister slowly suffocated him. Sally realised she was hugging too hard and released her brother, who stumbled a few steps backwards in a daze. Sally gave her brother a worried look, but he smiled and assured he was okay. A few of his friends chuckled lightly.

As Charlie Brown caught his breathe Violet and Patty walked directly into his line of sight. Charlie Brown was delighted to see that even Violet looked overjoyed.

"I've got to admit... for everything I've ever said about you... what you just did, that was pretty amazing Charlie Brown" Violet told him. Charlie Brown smiled impishly.

"Well... it wasn't all that great" Charlie Brown said humbly. Violet rolled her eyes.

"I thought you were past the state of putting yourself down" Violet noted. Charlie Brown looked down awkwardly, but Violet still smiled at him "Really though Charlie Brown, there's no need to be humble. You were pretty spectacular back there, I don't think anyone could have done a better job at this Guardian thing than you. And I mean that completely" Violet placed her hands behind her back, staring remorsefully at her feet "I meant everything else I said as well. I should have treated you better than-"

Charlie Brown held up a hand to silence her, looking very understanding "I know Violet. You don't have to repeat yourself. I know you didn't mean to treat me so badly, and I forgive you. Just knowing you do care is enough for me" He said simply. Violet smiled at his response, giving him a look of... no, no Charlie Brown must have been imagining it. But for a second it appeared she was looking at him in admiration.

Violet began to step back into the crowd of Peanuts. Patty leaned forward and gave Charlie Brown a hug. "What she said" Patty said, gesturing to Violet. She gave him a smile and rejoined Violet. Charlie Brown thought he should say something, but he was then suddenly hoisted into the air as the mad rush of grateful students finally made their way forward to cheer for him.

"Let's all give it up for Charlie Brown, the bravest of us all!" Roy declared. The Peanuts happily joined in to the explosion of cheers as the entire student body celebrated Charlie Brown's victory. Floating not too far away from this scene, Sparky watched as Charlie Brown was hailed and cheered by his friends and peers with a look of fatherly pride.

"Well done Charlie... well done" Sparky silently congratulated his successor.

"NOOOOO!" Sparky's attention was caught by that anguished scream. He knew exactly who it was.

Far away from the rest of the cheering students, the Dark Followers were in shock. All of them stared in disbelief at Charlie Brown, shocked that the boy long known as a failure face had triumphed over Agate. Thibault was especially distraught, being the one who screamed. He just couldn't accept the fact that Joe could have lost

to that blockhead, and now all of their plans were ruined. They were screwed!

Eggman was the first in that group to approach the downed Joe, followed shortly by Thibault and the rest of them. The scientist noticed Joe was still trying to move, so helped him sit in an upright position.

"Well, that could have gone better" Eggman commented. Joe shook the dizziness out of his head and tried to get up again.

"I can't... give up. I won't let Brown win" Joe said weakly. Eggman and Thibault pulled him back down to the ground.

"My boy you are in a right mess. If you tried fighting Charlie Brown any more you'd just end up killing yourself. Just accept defeat and get out while the going is good" Eggman said pointedly.

"Yeah Joe" Thibault nodded, then he snidely added "Face it, you goofed up big time"

Joe snarled at his short friend, but could do nothing more than lower his head in shame.

"Boy, we sure bet on the wrong horse" Molly Volley commented as the other Dark Followers voiced their agreement.

"It's completely unthinkable that Charlie Brown could have beaten Joe in a life or death battle. But by God, that dumb pumpkin head is tougher than he looks" Freddie added bitterly.

"I think maybe now might be a good time to quit" Tapioca Pudding noted, to which the others unanimously agreed.

Sparky watched the villains speak. Noticing the Mirror of Twilight was still in Eggman's hand he hovered over to the evil scientist and asked to speak into it. Eggman held up the mirror, and the grouchy, furious face of The Witch greeted Sparky.

"Don't feel too bad sister, this plan was doomed from the start" Sparky told his sister's reflection, who growled at him.

"It almost worked. I almost had your foolish little Guardian in my clutches. Absolute victory would have been mine!" The Witch bellowed, shaking a fist in the mirror. Sparky smiled and shook his head.

"You really haven't changed much, have you?"

"I swear Sparky, I WILL defeat your new champion. My plans are far from over, I swear the Realm of Light SHALL fall into darkness" The Witch vowed. Sparky rolled his eyes.

"I think you'll have a hard time achieving that now that Charlie Brown is Guardian of Light" Sparky said confidently. The Witch sneered at him.

"He may have vanquished Joe, but he's still just a foolish little boy. What makes you so sure he won't perish against the next villain I send after him?" The Witch asked snidely. Sparky smirked knowingly.

"Simple. He is the Hero of Light" Sparky replied. These simple words seemed to have a shockingly strong effect on the Witch, as she began hyperventilating and even fell out of the frame of the mirror for a brief moment. She shot back up soon after and laughed.

"OH PLEASE. We both know that's just a bunch of balony the Ancients came up with so they wouldn't feel too guilty about sealing me away instead of just plainly killing me and sealing away my power" The Witch said, trying hard to remain in denial. Sparky's grin widened.

"Polokus has never had a false prophecy yet, my sister. Trust me, when the time comes, Charlie Brown and the forces of light will defeat you, and seal you away for good" Sparky replied confidently. His sister's reflection glared in disbelief.

"If you want my advise, dear sister, you should surrender now while you can. You'll never succeed now" Sparky added before he began to float away back to the heroes side. He stopped for a moment to address the Dark Followers "You're all free to rejoin your fellow students any time you like, by the way" And he hovered back to the crowd of students lifting Charlie Brown up, deciding it would be safe to leave the triumphed villains to their own devices for just a short moment.

Boy, how wrong he would turn out to be.

The Dark Followers watched Sparky leave and looked to Joe. They all wanted to leave, there was definitely no point siding with the bad guys now that they'd lost. But Joe just looked so sad sitting there beaten to a pulp that they felt sorry for him, and decided to at least wait a moment to see what became of the bully.

Joe shook off some of the pain in his head as he looked up to see Charlie Brown nearby, being cheered on by his friends as the students chanted his name. The bully's blood boiled and his desire to pound the boy grew a thousand times.

"Mark my words Brown, I'll get even. Someday soon, I'm going to make you regret ever being born" Joe silently promised his enemy.

"But that day is not today" The Witch's voice pointed out. Joe turned to see her disappointed face in the mirror "I'm ashamed of your lack of progress Joe. But I suppose you haven't proven entirely useless, so for the time being I'll still take you on as my apprentice. Now, return to the Realm of Darkness. _Immediately_"

Joe nodded his head. Now was definitely the time to flee. But not too suddenly.

Channelling whatever possible power he had left, Joe pushed Eggman and Thibault aside and just about managed to get to his feet and take a few steps forward.

Over at Charlie Brown's side, the hero noticed Joe getting up and asked to be put back down. The students placed Charlie Brown back onto his feet, the hero then took a few more steps forward to get a better look at Joe. The Peanuts watched anxiously as the rivals stared each other down, wondering what that rat Joe was up to.

At first Joe just glared at Charlie Brown for a while, and then he let out a defeated sigh.

"Well Brown, I hate to say it, but you win" Joe confessed, his pride rapidly evaporating "Clearly I have misjudged your abilities and the power of your bonds. But be aware, I shall not make that same mistake again. So let's just see how you do next time... WITHOUT YOUR PRECIOUS FRIENDS"

In a flash Joe threw his arms forward. An enormous swirling vortex of darkness appeared on the ground below the kids Joe had recruited. The Dark Followers struggled and screamed, but were quickly sunk into the darkness. Thibault and Eggman wasted no time in hopping into the portal aswell.

Charlie Brown's eyes widened in shock, and he shot forward in an effort to stop Joe from getting away. But when he was only half way to the bully, something much worse happened. Charlie Brown was halted by a loud tearing noise from behind him. He came to a stop and turned around to find that a dozen or so dark portals had popped up nearby his friends.

The Peanuts stared in shock and horror at the dark portals. What proved more horrifying was the long, shadowy hands that suddenly reached out of the portals to grab several of them. The Peanuts gasped and struggled as the hands began pulling them in.

"NO" Charlie Brown cried, forgetting about Joe completely and making a beeline to his friends. His first instinct was to rescue his sister first, but Sally was already dragged into the portal before he got there, and the vortex closed up immediately after. To add to Charlie Brown's horror, Peppermint Patty had tried grabbing onto Sally to pull her out, but got dragged in too.

Charlie Brown froze, fear overcoming him. He couldn't believe it, his sister and one of his closest friends were gone! Gone somewhere he didn't know where, somewhere he might never find them.

It was only the screams of several more of his friends that snapped Charlie Brown out of these horrid thoughts. Charlie Brown could only watch as Pigpen, Freida, Schroeder and Franklin disappear into the dark portals.

"No. NO" Was all Charlie Brown could think. Desparately he rushed forward to save his friends. He reached Linus, but he was pulled through before Charlie Brown could grab onto his leg. Charlie Brown then made a break for Lucy, but the fussbudget was dragged into her portal long before Charlie Brown reached her. Panic rose up in Charlie Brown as, one by one, all of his friends were dragged into the vanishing portals of darkness. Eventually only Snoopy and Woodstock were left behind, and the hand stretching out of the final portal had already grabbed Snoopy by the nose.

In a last desperate move, Charlie Brown rushed forward to grab hold of Snoopy. He pulled back on his pet beagle, refusing to let the darkness take him too. A second hand reached out of the darkness and touched Charlie Brown's head. But immediately after contact with the Guardian the hand recoiled in pain, as though it had been burnt, and retreated back into the portal. At the same time, the hand that had

hold of Snoopy released it's grip and retreated, sending Charlie Brown falling back on his rear.

Nearby, Joe watched Charlie Brown with an evil smile. Satisfied with his last act of spite, Joe fell backwards into the vortex of darkness and vanished along with the others.

With Agate's departure silence fell over the school. The students all stared on in open mouthed shock, too scared to move or make any sort of reaction. Sparky was even more taken aback by this sudden turn of events. He felt helpless, he had seen what was happening and he could do nothing to save the young ones, all because he wasn't solid enough to pull them to safety. With much worry, Sparky allowed his eyes to drift towards the one who was most affected by Joe's fiendish trick.

Charlie Brown was still on the floor, staring at the spot where the final portal had closed in the same speechless shock as everyone else. Snoopy was shaking in his arms, glad he was rescued but scared for the others that had just been lost in the madness. Woodstock, by much fortune not a target in Joe's ploy, fluttered up to Charlie Brown's shoulder, patting it tenderly. This did nothing to comfort Charlie Brown, in fact Woodstock's pats actually made it quicker for Charlie Brown's mind to register the full blunt of what had just gone on.

And then he cried. Charlie Brown put his face in his hands and cried. Misery and grief swam over him like never before, and Charlie Brown felt empty inside. Sparky, his expression anguished but comforting, floated down to his protégé and patted his shoulder.

"I am so sorry Charlie Brown" Sparky spoke soothingly. Charlie Brown's only response was to cry even more, as Sparky stroked his head with his barely made solid hand "I know this is hard on you Charlie, but it's going to be alright, I promise"

"NO. No it's not!" Charlie Brown cried out, looking at Sparky with his face contorted with grief and self hate "Don't you get it, I screwed up! After all that, I still failed! I let Joe do that to the people I care about, and now my friends are all dead because of me!"

"They are not dead Charlie-"

"I know, but they're as good as! I know what those were, those were portals to the realm of darkness, Joe tried to use them on me. And in that case, there's no way we can save them in time. They're going to die, or worse be turned into heartless, and if that happens I wouldn't know how to change them back. They're gone, gone forever, and it's all my fault for being so... so useless!" Charlie Brown collapsed on the floor again, crying his heart out. Nearby the students all looked on in mourning. Peggy Jean tried to go up to Charlie Brown, but was held back by Roy, who shook his head and gave her a "Give him time" look. Peggy Jean stepped back and looked sadly at the boy she once loved.

Sparky watched with sad understanding as Charlie Brown lay there in misery, Snoopy and Woodstock trying hopelessly to cheer him up. A look of fierce determination spread over his face.

"Charlie Brown, your friends are not dead, and neither are they in the Realm of Darkness!" Sparky said sternly. His words managed to shock Charlie Brown out of his grief for just a moment, as he looked up at him.

"Wha-what?" Charlie Brown wondered.

"Your friends are not too far gone Charlie Brown, gather your wits and we may just save them" Sparky said importantly. Charlie Brown didn't understand.

"But... how?"

"Well, let's just say I don't think Joe's kidnapping routine went quite the way he'd intended it" Sparky said. Charlie Brown stared at the ghostly guardian uncertainly as he spoke further "Open a portal to the light palace. You can have a moment to gather your thoughts and I shall explain everything there. Understand"

Charlie Brown nodded, though still uncertain and scared. With much difficulty. Charlie Brown just about managed to open a portal of light as the students watched on in wonder. Sparky turned to the group, his eyes wandering over the destruction caused by the earlier battles.

"Um... Just tell your principal I'll send him a cheque for the damages. And any other damage caused to the city. For now I recommend you all go home and stay safe. I'm sorry you all got dragged into this" Sparky meekly told the students. He motioned Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock through the portal, which vanished behind them, leaving the students of Birchwood Middle School watching on in confusion and worry.

* * *

><p>Within the Realm of Darkness, Freddie Fabulous, Melody Melody and all the other children that had agreed to side with the Dark Empire shivered with fright as the Witch's shadowy form floated over and around them. Unfortunate victims of Joe's last stunt, it seemed they were all now trapped here in this Realm. But at the very least, they weren't subjected to the Witch's wrath. That was all on Joe, and to a much lesser extent Thibault and Eggman.<p>

"Idiots! That's what you all are, IDIOTS! Especially you!" She pointed an accusing finger at Joe, still battle worn and barely able to lift his head up to her.

"I told you to leave, I told you that you'd already lost. Then what do you do?! You keep fighting anyway! And now Charlie Brown's more powerful than ever! Honestly, the only good thing that came out of this was that you weren't captured so my brother and the Ancients couldn't seal away the portion of my power within you. But that's not a victory! You failed, and I do not tolerate failure" The Witch told Agate with venom. Joe spat out a broken too and a bit of blood as the Witch hovered passed him.

"Alright, I get it already. It doesn't matter, I'll kill him next time" Joe said nonchalantly. The Witch's ruby eyes flared with anger as she got right up in Joe's face.

"You're lucky there's even going to BE a next time, you twerp!" The Witch howled "Your sorry excuse for a plan nearly botched up our whole invasion. I swear to you Agate, if you ever screw up this bad again, you're not just fired as my apprentice. You're DEAD!"

The Witch scoffed at Joe and floated away from him. The warrior of darkness shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. When he had a better sense of what he was doing, Joe called out "I did one thing right. I captured Charlie Brown's worthless friends, that'll undermine his confidence and make it much easier to kill him next time"

The Witch stopped. She turned her head to face Joe again and waved her hand around.

"Do you actually see any of those brats here. No, none but the brats that joined up with you. In your moment of defeat you forgot you can't yet teleport people with more light in their heart than darkness. By dragging them through all those portals you've only succeeded in scattering them into White Space" The Witch explained coldly. Joe cursed softly.

"Well... that'll still be a hard blow to Brown's confidence" Joe tried to reason.

"Until they find them again" The Witch pointed out in a nasty tone "Face it, you screwed up"

Nearby, Eggman stood in thought "What we need is to start recruiting" Eggman voiced his opinion, gaining the attentions of The Witch and Joe "As much as there are heroes in the Realm of Light, there are also villains. Villains who we could very likely convince to side with us. We've discussed this before, remember. We just need to hurry up and recruit, then we'll overpower our bald headed friend. Quite simple"

"Conquering the Realm of Light requires more than a few mere team ups Ivo" The Witch corrected, but sighed in agreement afterwards "But that is the best place to start. While Charlie Brown concerns himself with those scattered brats, we'll begin making our preparations" She looked down at Thibault "Take Joe to a bed or something. His healing power will restart itself soon and he'll recharge. You just stay out of my way until I have use for you" Thibault nodded, despite his extreme sexism and inner resentment about working for a woman, he wasn't about to argue with The Dark Witch. With little regard to Joe's comfort, Thibault hoisted him up and dragged him off somewhere in the shadows.

"And what should we do with this lot" Eggman asked the Witch in regards to the other young ones. The Witch spared a brief glance at the terrified youths and shrugged.

"Give them blankets and whatever. Maybe we'll find some use for them. If not, they would always make good heartless" The Witch responded. Eggman ushered the children away to a safe location as the Witch just floated around, contemplating her next course of action. After a moment of silence Eggman reappeared.

"In the interest of maintaining my own life I would like to say I'm sorry for failing to contribute anything to this mission, my dear"

The scientist said with a respectful bow.

"I never really expected you to do much of anything in that situation Ivo. Though once you have reacquired your old toys I'll expect you to start pulling your own weight around here. Ancients help you if you don't" The Witch said. Eggman wasn't able to tell whether or not that was meant as a threat.

"I promise on Sonic's life" Dr Eggman replied. The Witch sensed his worries.

"You needn't fear destruction Ivo. To tell the truth I've grown accustomed to you. Not having anyone to talk to for a few million years it's good to have someone around whom I can discuss matters with" The Witch said half pleasantly.

"Oh. Well, thank you, you're very welcome" Eggman said uncertainly.

"Save the pleasantries for later egghead. We've have much to discuss regarding our coup" The Witch said. Eggman nodded.

"So, what do you think of this Charlie Brown" Eggman asked off handedly. The Witch came to a sudden stop. After a minute of just standing there Eggman looked up to see a contemplative, somewhat cautious look on her face.

"I think we need to kill him. Now"

* * *

><p>Back in the Light Palace, a portal opened up. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Woodstock and Sparky exited the portal, at which point Charlie Brown asked "So what's happening? What do you mean we can save them?"<p>

Sparky motioned for Charlie Brown to take a seat, but he refused to sit down until everything was sorted out. the spirit took a moment to choose his words carefully before explaining himself.

"Well Charlie, it's like this. Joe attempted to drag your friends into the Realm of Darkness through portals. But, he forgot an important factor of dark portals, he cannot forcibly drag people through them unless their hearts contain a greater portion of darkness than light, or if they have chosen to align themselves with darkness. While Thibault and the other children that rooted for Joe to win might have made it through to my sisters Realm, your friends very likely did not. Joe is a beginner like yourself, I highly doubt he has mastered the art of portal making. The most likely outcome is that your friends ended up in White Space"

Charlie Brown's spirits, sunk to an all time low by the tragic event that had just transpired, began to rise ever so slightly.

"So what does that mean, we can summon them back here?" Charlie Brown asked hopefully. He was put out by Sparky's heavy sigh.

"Not quite that simple I'm afraid" Sparky replied. Charlie Brown urgently motioned for him to continue "We still don't know exactly where they are in White Space, and tracking down their locations will

be difficult. By the time we do, I assume they'll most likely have ended up on another world within the Realm of Light, due to the unstable method in which they were sucked into the barriers. At which point, we would have to travel the worlds to find them"

Charlie Brown did not like the sound of this "But that could take forever! What if come out in a volcano, or the middle of the ocean, or who knows where? Anything could happen to them before we find them!"

"Exactly. Which is why we will have to find them as quick as we can" Sparky nodded. Charlie Brown did not maintain much confidence in this situation.

"And if we don't?" Charlie Brown asked miserably.

"Do not think about that. Remain hopeful, always hang on to hope. Otherwise your powers will cease to function properly, and you will be unable to help any of them whatsoever" Sparky said sagely. Charlie Brown sighed miserably, but realized there was probably no other way around it.

"So how do we track them down?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Just leave all of that to me. You just go to sleep, rest. After everything you've just been through, you'll need it" Sparky replied as he assumed a meditative stance. Charlie Brown was aghast.

"I can't just go to sleep! My friends have just been scattered across the universe, how am I supposed to sleep knowing THAT! I need to be out there finding them!" Charlie Brown argued.

"You're of no use to anyone in the panicked your in. And as I've said, it will take time for me to determine everyones location, you'd only be torturing yourself mentally by staying awake to dwell on what you've just endured. Sleep, it will only be for a few hours, then I promise we'll dedicate every moment of our time finding your friends" Sparky tried to reassure his apprentice. But of course, Charlie Brown was in no state to be reasoned with.

"But I can't do that, my friends, my own sister are out there, lost and in who knows what kind of danger! I can't just-" Charlie Brown was cut off as Sparky suddenly floated down and pressed his semi-solid hand against Charlie Brown's forehead. The worry and stress faded from Charlie Brown's eyes, as did all conscious thought, as he began to fall into a dreamless sleep. As he fell backwards one of the armchairs near the TV area sprung forward to catch him. Perhaps he was weak as a spirit, but old Sparky still new a few tricks.

Snoopy and Woodstock, silent up until now, likely due to the shock of everything that had transpired, hopped up onto the arms of the chair and examined the sleeping Charlie Brown. Snoopy turned curiously to Sparky.

"A necessary precaution. He'll awake shortly. I suggest you sleep too, otherwise please don't cause too much mischief" Sparky told the two animals. A moment later Snoopy had curled up on Charlie Brown's lap with his head rested in his owner's hand while Woodstock was nuzzled up with them, using one of Snoopy's ears as a blanket. Sparky

watched Charlie Brown sleep for a while. It always astounded him how peaceful people could look in their sleep. He hoped Charlie would have calmed down a bit by the time he awoke. He could not blame the boy for how he was acting, he was actually handling the stress better than anyone could have been expected to. Another reason he would make a good Guardian.

"Sleep well Charlie. I promise you, everything will be alright. By the time you wake up, I will have found where they are" Sparky silently promised his apprentice.

"Can it not wait but a moment?" Came a new, unearthly voice with a faint echo. Sparky's ears rose in surprise at first, but after registering the voice he knew what it was about. He turned to the corner where the diamond statue of Polokus was located. However, it was the real thing, from the long yellow arms to the big purple top hat.

"It's time we talked" Polokus spoke again in his other worldly voice. Sparky nodded curtly and bowed before the Ancient.

"I suppose it is, my lord of dreams" Sparky said with utmost courtesy. In the next few moments the other statues of the Ancients began to come alive. Aslan's statue became real first, his entire body a brilliant gold but for his emerald green eyes. Next came Odin, then God, then Master Hand, followed by Exodia. The six Ancients and Sparky gathered in a circle before the statue of the final Ancient, Arceus, who came to life shortly after.

Immediately after the diamond statue had turned to flesh and gold, Sparky and even the other Ancients bowed before their leader, the Original One himself. Arceus bowed back to them, a signal for them all to rise to their feet.

"Sparky, my old friend. I am sorry for what has become of you" Arceus spoke to the ghost guardian in a voice that was truly noble and kind.

"Many thanks, my high lord, but it is alright. I knew it was always a matter of time before I fell in battle. But my death is of no worry to me, my concerns reach far greater than that" Sparky replied in his most respectful tone.

"Indeed. We are all concerned with the Witch's freedom. And we must not waste time making preparations to reseal her" Odin spoke next.

"I understand Odin, and I promise that I have already devised a strategy. As soon as Charlie Brown's friends are rescued, we shall begin uniting the heroes of this universe to aid us in this war" Sparky replied.

"The children are of far less importance, we must ensure the protection of the worlds in this Realm before anything else" Odin said sternly, to which Sparky bent the knee.

"Forgive me, lord Odin, but I have promised Charlie Brown I would help him find his friends now. We cannot leave them to suffer" Sparky said, having expected Odin's defiance and anticipating it would go further.

"His duty and yours is to the Realm, Guarding the worlds comes before anything else" Odin said coldly. The other Ancients seemed more supportive of Sparky and Charlie Brown's plight.

"The Guardians duty, and our duty is to the people first and foremost. Charlie Brown's friends have been misplaced across the worlds, it is only right that we find them before anything unfortunate should happen" Aslan argued.

"Then he can search for them while he is uniting the heroes" Odin stubbornly replied "The point is, The Witch isn't going to wait around. Even now as we speak, she is no doubt initiating whatever other plans she has concocted over the Eons to plunge the worlds in darkness. That is what we must concern ourselves with"

Sparky nodded "I understand, and I shall do everything I can to lead Charlie Brown to victory against my sister" Sparky was a bit disturbed by the foul look Odin sent towards the sleeping Charlie Brown.

"Of all the warriors in the universe, why him, a mere child had to be chosen, I shall never know. I have seen how this boy is, he is fearful, weak and lacks the willpower needed of a Guardian. He is the wrong choice for the new Guardian of Light, if we continue with him as the Realm's defender we are sure to fail" Odin said sternly.

"And who would you rather have as the Guardian. Your son Thor?" God asked in a booming voice "If the choice was up to you Odin, there would be no one worthy of Guardianship. Charlie Brown may be young, but so are many of the greatest heroes these worlds know. You judge him too harshly, I am sure Sparky made the right decision"

"That actually brings me to the part I am most curious about" Arceus suddenly interrupted. Everyone turned curiously to him as he looked down upon Sparky "Why did you lie to him. Before you told Charlie Brown that you had no say in who your powers chose to become the new Guardian, but you did. It was always your choice who should succeed you. And why did you insist there was no way to give his powers to someone else, when we all know that can indeed happen. Why did you tell him otherwise?"

The accusing eyes of the Ancients were upon Sparky (Except for Master Hand, who had no eyes, but he still somehow shared the others' look). Sparky bowed respectfully "Because of the second lie I told him, that there had been no prophecy to foretell that he would be chosen to become the Guardian. I did not tell him there could be another Guardian because he would have chosen immediately to have someone else take up the role. And I... I believe there should be no other. I believe that Charlie Brown is the Hero of Light of which Polokus foretold"

Silence followed Sparky's explanation, as the Ancients all looked contemplative.

"... Can this be true, Polokus?" Exodia asked, in a voice that was deep and metallic, but which also contained a great deal of humanity deep down.

"In my dreams, I did foretell of a future Guardian who would go on to

defeat the Witch once and for all, and bring a never ending era of peace to the worlds. And seeing his progress from afar, Charlie Brown could very well be the Hero. What do the rest of you think?" Polokus queried.

"I believe the boy has very much potential, and that if he is trained well he could very well be the chosen one" Aslan answered immediately.

"I agree with your beliefs. I have my doubts, he is after all very young and inexperienced, but with time... he could be" Exodia said thoughtfully.

"I honestly do not know what I believe. However, the boy has sure proven himself a capable Guardian. With time, he could be the Hero of Light, but that has yet to be seen" God said vaguely.

"I believe I needn't repeat my opinion" Odin sneered "But I shall anyway. The boy is too young, too meek to be the Guardian. If you believe him to be the Hero of Light, Sparky, then I'm afraid your mind may be fading with age"

Odin's words disappointed Sparky, but he would not let the All-father's opinion affect his own. He turned to Master Hand next, expecting his opinion.

"Hmm..." A voice boomed from Master Hand, despite the obvious lack of a mouth on him "Well, I'm afraid I must agree with Odin on some points. Charlie Brown is young and I don't think he could be the Hero of Light for which Polokus foretold. I don't, however, share the belief that he would not make an appropriate Guardian, if given the proper training. Perhaps I could arrange a little test of his-"

"We are at war with the Realm of Darkness, we do not have time for any of your games Master Hand" Odin coldly interrupted. The godly hand shook himself in a downtrodden manner.

"Oh... yes. Well, I still think we should give him a chance. You never know, the unlikeliest of competitors can emerge the champion" Master Hand suggested. Everyone turned at last to Arceus for his opinion, the most important opinion as far as any of them were concerned. Arceus hummed thoughtfully. His face held little expression, but it was clear from his eyes that he was thinking deeply.

After an eternity of silence, Arceus looked down once more to Sparky.

"I believe you made a wise choice in your successor" Arceus said kindly. Sparky smiled thankfully, as Odin looked aghast.

"Oh very well. He shall still never be the Hero of Light" The kind of Asgard insisted.

"Do not be so sure of that, my friend" Arceus replied "The Witch's return is no coincidence. Everything happens for a reason. For all we know at this point, Charlie Brown could very well be the prophesised one" Arceus gave the other Ancients a moment to process those words before moving on "But whether he is the Hero of Light is of little concern right now. What matters is making preparations for the

upcoming war. I shall inform my children Dialga and Palkia of what has transpired, and I shall send the lake Guardians to awaken the worlds most powerful legendary pokemon"

"I shall inform the fairies of the Witch's return, the Glade of dreams shall be well protected. And of course I shall dream up as many brave warriors as I can to battle the heartless" Said Polokus.

"I shall meet with the kings and queens of Narnia and assemble the armies of my world aswell" Aslan agreed.

"I feat I have no armies to summon, nor can I be of much use while my physical form remains bound in chains, as it should be. But with my spiritual form I shall help plan our strategy" Exodia offered.

"Unfortunately the armies of Asgard cannot be of much help in this matter, as we are already facing the threat of Surtur, who is almost as grave a danger as the Witch herself. But we shall do what we can" Odin said grimly.

"I have already assembled the armies of Heaven and strengthened the barriers against hell. We shall do all we can to prevent the Witch from summoning the undead for her cause" God explained.

"And I... I have very little to offer, since I do not have my own self-created world or armies to fight with, but I can train the heroes our new Guardian united so that they are at the best of their abilities" Master Hand suggested. After a brief silence he sighed "It's just a shame we can't be more involved in all this, due to these accursed restrictions we have placed upon ourselves..."

"These restrictions were created for a reason" Arceus sternly reminded the Hand "But fear not my friend, as long as we plan our every move carefully, things should work out for the best"

"For the best" Odin laughed, a very dark, mirthless laugh. "The Dark Witch is freed. She has warriors from the Realm of Light to act as her agents of chaos. A war the likes of which we haven't seen since the dark ages is about to begin. And by the time it is over, millions, billions, perhaps trillions of people are likely to be dead, and that's the more positive outcome. What part of all this sounds to you like it will "Work out for the best"?"

The deities shifted nervously, even Arceus looked fearful.

"Only one thing matters and is for sure, we cannot afford to lose this war. We must do everything we can, or all our efforts to make this a universe worth living in shall be in vain. My friends... be ready"

* * *

><p>Tiger lover 16: Well, bet you weren't expecting that huh folks? Yeah, I needed to have the Ancients appear at some point, and a good reason to have all the other peanuts characters more fully involved in the story. So the next few arcs will focus on Charlie Brown tracking down his friends and recruiting heroes. Lazy storytelling much? Well tough, that's what you get! Just kidding. If

any of those last scenes feel rushed, they are a bit. I just wanted to get this chapter out of the way quick. To be honest, this chapter's been kinda a pain to write. The first scene in Charlie Brown's mind, that's kinda a disappointment to me. I based it Lucy on that awesome episode of Spectacular Spider man, episode 12 where Spidey and Venom have a mental battle with the spirit, or perhaps memory of uncle Ben helping Pete out. Obviously this isn't the same thing, it's not quite as satisfying really. I'll go back and edit it in the future, but I really don't want to worry about it now because, frankly, it's beyond my current skill level. And with finding a job my main priority right now, I have to focus my mind on priorities. Sorry about that. I wasn't really sure exactly what I wanted the scene to play out like, so it was difficult planning it out, and while trying to write as I thought it would naturally play out... made it harder and a lot more complicated. Yeah, I admit I'm a good writer, but not a great one. If you want genius writing you should read Zerobens marvel stories. It's the next few chapters I'm more interested in writing right now though. On that note, I've got those announcements to make. First of all, I'm no longer the only person writing this story. As of next chapter, my good friend toonwriter is helping me to write this story. We were going to write a peanutspokemon crossover, but neither of us really had the time, so he agreed to help me with this. The guy has a great sense of humour, which is exactly what I need for the next few chapters since, while no where near kiddy they're much more lighthearted than this opening arc, which is generally dark. And hopefully that'll mean the next chapter will be up a bit quicker. We've been meaning to collaborate for a while, so it's all good. Hopefully he won't sacrifice time on his other stories to help me though, I'm dying to read the next chapter of P-Nuts protectors. I said earlier, if anyone still remembers, that there'd be too announcements. Well, here you go then, I now have the full list of series I'll be using in this story. Not saying there won't at least be a reference to any more, but this is all we're planning to include at the moment. Might change if toonboy has another one of his power rangers nostalgia trips, but here's the list for now:**

Peanuts (Main series)

Mario*

Sonic*

Powerpuff Girls*

Spiderman, plus wider Marvel universe*

Ed Edd n Eddy

Crash Bandicoot*

Harry Potter*

Pokemon*

Dragon Ball Z*

Simpsons

Spyro the Dragon (Mix of original series with elements of the Legend

series, probably no reference to Skylanders, though that might be features as an alternate universe)

Rayman

Chronicles of Narnia (Probably just Aslan, might include world but less likely)

Jackie Chan Adventures*

Xiaolin Showdown*

Code Lyoko

Naruto

Kingdom Hearts (Just the heartless, might introduce keyblades)

Ratchet and Clank

Young Justice*

Yu-gi-oh (Just Exodia, probably not full crossover)

Ben 10 Ultimate Alien

Tiger Lover 16: Well, there you have it. Hope this chapter wasn't too much of a disappointment. I couldn't include everything I want, but why stuff all the character developments into one chapter. I've got whole arcs coming up which I can use to resolve some issues and set up new plot points. Well, I'm sure there's more I wanted to say, but I can't remember now. Oh well, you folks all have a nice day. I'll see you soon with a new chapter. Oh right, now I remember. Regarding my other stories, It's the Philosopher's Stone and You're Amazing, Charlie Brown. Don't worry, they haven't been abandoned, I'm actually writing them now. It'll be a while for both of them, I'm never good at meeting a deadline, but they'll be up as soon as I can get them done. Promise. Well, see you folks.

8. You're in the Mushroom Kingdom, CB Pt 1

**Tiger Lover 16: Hello folks, how've you been? So, this chapter didn't take too long then, thank goodness. I'm sorry for people waiting to read my other stories but I couldn't help it, this story is just too much fun not to write at the moment. I will be taking a hiatus from this story now until Christmas however, God willing I'll be able to finish off the next chapter's of Philosopher's Stone, Charlie Brown and You're Amazing, Charlie Brown by then, as a Christmas present for all my readers. Hopefully. I have got parts of both written, it's just getting back to them is the problem, especially when this story has become my main priority. That and my joint project It's Kingdom Hearts, Charlie Brown at the moment. Hopefully with the new year I'll be able to get back in the swing of my other stories. At over a year overdue I think it's been too long since an update for either. I haven't given up, I just don't know what I'm doing lately on this site. Well, all that aside, I hope you enjoy this chapter. I must say, I'm very pleased with how this one turned out. It may be a lot more light hearted than the last few

chapters, but that's what makes it a fun read. The second scene, which introduces the Mario bros and a lot of principle characters, was written by Supah-Toon (Toonwriter's current penname), with me doing a little editing and changing the format to make it fit with the rest of the chapter, but it's still his work. I will admit, the scene he wrote contradicted a lot of what was originally planned. However, it turned out to make things better in a way, it gave a proper introduction to a lot of the characters before throwing them into the plot. Well, I'll save everything else for the notes on the bottom, have fun everyone**

* * *

><p>Chapter 7, You're in the Mushroom Kingdom, Charlie Brown: Part 1

Slowly, his eyes flickered open. The bright lights overhead blinded him at first, but after a minute of blinking Charlie Brown's eyes eventually adjusted enough to the light that he could see most of what was around him. He soon realized he was in the Light Palace, Snoopy and Woodstock were sitting on a table playing a card game, Woodstock apparently winning, while Sparky was floating above in a meditative state, apparently oblivious to the rest of the world around him.

Shaking off a dizzy spell, Charlie Brown pushed himself out of the armchair he was sat in and rose unsteadily to his feet.

Back on the table, Woodstock revealed his hand, a full house. Snoopy's first reaction was shocked silence. His next reaction was to kick all the cards off the table.

"Luck, luck, luck! It's all a matter of luck! No skills involved!" Snoopy exclaimed. If it was an attempt to save grace, he was failing miserably at it. Woodstock shook his head at his friends antics and turned away, spotting Charlie Brown rubbing his head while trying to gather his thoughts. The little bird chirped merrily and tugged at Snoopy's arm, pointing to Charlie Brown when he had gotten his friends attention. Snoopy's face lit up and his tail started wagging as he ran forward to hug his owner, tackling him to the ground in the process.

Charlie Brown shook his head from the fall as Snoopy began licking his face, only to gag shortly after.

"Bleah. No offense intended, but I think you need a bath" Snoopy told his owner, who didn't understand him anyway.

Charlie Brown patted Snoopy on the head and looked up at Sparky, who opened one eye to look back at him. Sparky smiled as he resumed a normal stance.

"Hello again Charlie, did you sleep well?" Sparky asked warmly.

"I guess" Charlie Brown said distantly "But I'm don't really remember falling asle-" Charlie Brown stopped abruptly, panic spreading over his face as the memories of everything that had transpired suddenly rushed back into his head "GOOD GRIEF. Agate?! My friends? Sally, Patty, Linus, everyone! What's happened!? How long have I been asleep!? Are they alright!? Have we found them yet!? No-no we haven't

found them, we haven't even started? Have we? Where-

"Calm down child" Sparky placed a hand over Charlie Brown's head again, focusing whatever energy he had into calming his apprentice down. Charlie Brown took a deep breath and sighed.

"So what's happened?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Well, for once some good news. In the three hours I've put you to sleep for, I've discovered the location of each of your friends" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown and Snoopy smiled at this "But there is some mildly bad news..." Their expressions became more hesitant "Apparently they've been scattered across a total of ten different worlds, and I don't know exactly where they are on said worlds, just that they're there" Snoopy frowned impatiently as Charlie Brown looked dreary.

"Well that's not much good, looking for them in whole worlds sounds like finding a needle in a haystack" Charlie Brown said dejectedly.

"Not necessarily" Sparky said optimistically "True, we don't know exactly where they are, but I have enough information and knowledge of the worlds to give an educated guess as to their general area of the worlds, and one of your powers, which I'm going to have to teach you along the way, involves tracking down specific beings. So in theory, tracking them all down might only take as little as two or three days if we really keep at it"

"Three days?" Charlie Brown wondered "I guess that's not too bad... but can't we go any faster than that?"

"Would that you were more experienced at tracking and teleporting Charlie, but nothing is ever simple I'm afraid" Sparky said heavily "But let us not dwell on such matters. Follow me"

Still feeling discouraged, and a small amount of self loathing for his lack of tracking ability proving a hindrance, Charlie Brown followed Sparky through the door to the left of Odin's statue, Snoopy and Woodstock following along behind them. Charlie Brown could have sworn the Ancients' statue was glaring at him with it's one eye.

The hallways they came out in held doors of varying colours, all of them with a different, curious symbol embedded in the centre. These included a red door with a symbol of a white and red spotted mushroom that had eyes, a blue door with seven coloured gems, a door with some sort of round orange sphere symbol with four red stars as it's centre, a door with two symbols, a wand with a glowing red tip and a castle, and a door with the symbol of a chair made out of many swords in the centre, with a carving of a dragon breathing fire over the top half of the door and a very strange, gaunt, painted white creature carved on the lower half. But these were just some examples, there were literally hundreds more doors with their own unique symbols and themes.

Growing curious, Charlie Brown asked "So what are all these doors for?"

Sparky, who had been floating around and examining a few specific doors, turned his head and replied "These doors are an explorers best

friend, I should think. These are the doors between worlds. Stepping through any of these doors will transport you to a location of yours or my choosing anywhere in a certain world"

Charlie Brown and the remaining pets marvelled at this new information, though Charlie Brown had a curious thought "Why would you need doors when you can teleport anywhere you want?"

"Not exactly anywhere. And it's for the sake of any guests I may have, so they can return to their world whenever they feel... so far they've gone unused for seven centuries. I don't get a lot of guests here" Sparky sighed "With a war with the darkness on the horizon however, that should change"

Charlie Brown walked past a few more doors, stroking the centre symbols as he passed. The knowledge that a whole world awaited him beyond any of them was mystifying, more than once he dared himself to open a door, just to get a peek at one of these worlds, but every time he lost his nerve and pulled his hand back from the handle. Snoopy on the other hand did not lack the nerve.

The first door Snoopy opened was a plain red one with black horizontal stripes, seemingly taking the place of a symbol. through the doorway Snoopy observed a street where a brown haired girl in overalls was walking. A spiky haired boy was sitting in a nearby tree, and as the girl passed he pelted her with a water balloon. The blond boy laughed at his prank... until the volatile girl grabbed a pebble on the ground and threw it at him. The small rock beaned the boy straight in the head, with enough force that it sent him falling out of the tree straight into an open trash can.

Snoopy closed this door and moved on to the next, which was plain brown and had a red circle with a black tyrannosaurus silhouette as the symbol. So it wasn't too much of a surprise when he opened the door to find a forest full of dinosaurs, but it did surprise him when a tyrannosaurus head suddenly lowered down right before them and roared. Snoopy and Woodstock floated above the ground in fright for a moment before Snoopy slammed the door shut.

Not deterred by their moment of terror, Snoopy and Woodstock looked to the next door, the symbol being a simple green leaf. Deciding this didn't seem too dangerous, Snoopy and Woodstock opened it up. The sight which greeted them this time was several attractive teenage girls bathing in a hot spring, their long hair and soap bubbles covering their... um... private areas. The girls playfully splashed each other, until the brunette with the cactus pointed the doorway out to the other girls. Then they all screamed. Their faces turning beet red, Snoopy and Woodstock slammed the door shut. Then, their hearts racing, the animal buddies pulled several wooden boards out of thin air and began nailing them to the door. When the door was adequately covered in boards, Snoopy finished by hanging a sign from the doorknob reading "Do not enter if you have any decency"

_"Seriously though, why would Sparky have a door leading to THAT?"
_Snoopy asked, still red with embarrassment. Woodstock tweeted a reply, which made them both giggle at the unlistening spirits
expense_._

"Snoopy, can you and Woodstock please stop messing around with the

doors. I've already lost everyone else I care about, the last thing I need is for you to get sucked into another world too" Charlie Brown scolded his mischievous pet and his friend. Snoopy grinned sheepishly and nodded in agreement. After another quick look around the trio spotted Sparky floating above them, meditating with his palms close together. A strange, misty energy began to form between his fingers. When Sparky lifted his hands, the energy dispersed in ten beams, each ending at one of the many doors. Above the doorframes, the energy reformed into new images... the faces of Charlie Brown's friends.

"I have marked the ten worlds where your friends have been scattered to" Sparky began as he floated near the door with the mushroom symbol, above which two faces floated, Peppermint Patty's and Sally's "Among them, only two worlds harbour more than one of your friends. Patricia and Sally as you can see have wound up in the Mushroom world, whereas Violet and Patty" he pointed to the door with the wand and castle symbols "Have ended up in the wizarding world. I can also determine that Linus is on Mobious, Schroeder is on the Marvel Earth, Lucy is in the Pokemon world, Rerun is somewhere in the Wumpa islands of Wumpa world, Franklin is on DC earth, Freida is in the city of Townsville, Pigpen is in the Dragon Ball world and Shermy in the Xiaolin world. So, now the only question is-where do you want to start looking?"

Charlie Brown was still pretty confounded by everything that was going on, but it didn't take too much thought for him to come up with the answer.

"Well, Sally is my sister, and if both her and Peppermint Patty are on this... Mushroom world? We should go there first" Sparky nodded in approval.

"Good choice. And while we're there we can perhaps recruit that worlds heroes, Mario and Luigi, to our cause. The Mario brothers are among the greatest and most capable heroes I know of in this universe, they would be an invaluable aid to our cause, and also our effort to find Sally and Patty. Mario has a knack for rescuing women" Sparky chuckled, though Charlie Brown was too unfamiliar with the subject to get the joke.

"So what do we do, just walk through the door?"

"Pretty much. The location you see through the frame isn't necessarily where you'll end up though, you'll be momentarily blinded by light until you have selected a location. As you haven't had the chance to visit this world yet, I will enter your mind to choose the location for you. I suggest you hold on to Snoopy and Woodstock's paw and wing on the way in, since I doubt they will want to miss out on travelling to different worlds" Sparky said with a knowing look to the two, who were suddenly dressed in their beagle scouts uniforms, ready for adventure. Snoopy and Woodstock gave an honourable salute as Sparky just rolled his eyes, not allowing himself to grin too much due to the serious matters at hand.

"Are you sure this is safe?" Charlie Brown asked after opening the door, to the image of a castle.

"It'll be fine Charlie. Like I've said many times before, just have faith" Sparky said kindly as he slipped into Charlie Brown head. Still looking apprehensive, Charlie Brown took a deep breath, held

onto Snoopy and Woodstock and jumped in through the doorway. The trio disappeared in a flash of light, and the door closed behind them.

* * *

><p>A beautiful kingdom filled with the largest variety of landscapes, flora, & fauna...each as unique (and weird) as the last...is shown to us as the backdrop for the next portion of our epic tale. We zoom into the hub of said kingdom, a large castle with hundreds of tiny mushroom headed men and women running around doing their jobs. These "Toads", as they're called, run around and work for the ruler of the castle and it's surrounding kingdom, The Mushroom Kingdom. Said ruler, Princess Peach, had organized a party today, and the Toads were running around trying to set it up. The occassion?<p>

"The Eleventieth Rescue of our Princess!" One Toad had declared as a citizen asked him what the occassion was for the party.

"Oh yes, we must celebrate. The Princess demands it!" Another Toad said. "And she wants everything perfect for when the guest of honour arrives"

"Who's the guest of honor?" A female Toad asked.

"You must be kidding, right? Everyone knows who the guest of honor is!" Another female Toad scolded her. "Why,-"

"IT'S-A ME...MARIO!"

The familiar phrase prompted everyone to jump, turn around and gaze at the guest of honor. Wearing his signature red long sleeved shirt, brown boots, jean overalls, and red hat with an "M" inside a white circle, the chubby, mustachio'ed plumber hopped over a hill and landed on his feet on the grass. He gave a thumbs up to everyone, who cheered for the land's hero. Behind him was a taller man who looked like him, except he was leaner and taller and wore green instead of red, with an "L" inside the white circle of his hat. The taller man, who was the stockier man's brother, walked right next to Mario and waved along with him.

"Wow, Mario, the crowd's really-a happy today!" The green brother, Luigi, said as he waved to the crowd.

Mario continued his waving, "And-a why not? We just saved the princess from another evil Bowser plot! The eleventieth, the Toads say. I can never keep up" He chuckled before hopping over towards the castle with a "Yahoo!" Luigi followed suit, jumping past a napping green dinosaur with a white underbelly, red dull spikes on his back, and brown "shoes" for feet. The brothers hopped over towards the castle and then ran onto the drawbridge through the door. The party was currently commencing, with hundreds of Toads attending the event. Although, one tall and lanky purple wearing man with a moustache was stuffing shrimp puffs in his pocket while a yellow wearing, purple overalled fat man was hogging the punch. Already, several Toads were regretting inviting Wario & Waluigi.

The brothers stood in the main halls of the castle, where the party took place mainly, and enjoyed the company of the Toads, who were "Oooing" and "Aaahing" over the heroes. Suddenly, the trumpets were

played as a Toad with a red spotted cap, Princess Peach's chief Mushroom Retainer, Toad (His parents weren't very good with names) came out with a box.

"Introducing...the princess and her companion...Princess Daisy...and Princess Peach!"

The Toad moved to the side as a yellow gown wearing brunette (who ruled a land a bit farther away from this one) walked out to the crowd. And behind her was the princess of_ this_ land. A pink gown wearing blond with blue eyes walked out to cheers from the crowd of subjects. They waved to everyone, especially the two heroes, before Toad spoke again.

"And now...to present our heroes with their special medals. These medals are for rescuing our princess so many times, we've just lost count! So we're calling it the eleventieth time! Mario...Luigi...would you come up here before the princess?"

The brothers nodded and walked up the steps as the crowd clapped for them. The green dinosaur waddled in just in the nick of time to watch the brothers get awarded. As for Wario and Waluigi, the Mario Brothers counterparts just booed as they hogged the food table.

The brothers stood in front of the princesses, who smiled and were presented with two gold medals by Peach's caretaker, the elderly Toadsworth. Princess Peach grabbed the medal with a green ribbon. Luigi took his hat off, showing his brown hair, and Princess Peach placed the medal over his head. Luigi put his hat back on as Princess Daisy gave him a smile. Peach then turned to Mario, and held up the medal with the red ribbon. Mario removed his hat and bowed politely before Peach placed a medal on his neck aswell. Mario placed his hat back on and turned to the crowd alongside his brother. The crowd cheered for the heroes (minus Wario & Waluigi) as Peach raised her hands.

"Now...let us enjoy the celebration!" Peach declared to the crowd, which was a signal for DJ Toad to start the true partying!

The party went on for hours as everyone had a great time (although the Wario brothers were escorted out of the party early for taking too many shrimp puffs and hogging the table). Mario & Luigi mingled and talked with everyone, and then conversed with the princesses. The event was deemed a success.

But one person didn't deem anything "successful"...

...far away in a different castle. A castle backdropped by a fiery land with turtles named Koopas patrolling it 24/7. The Koopas had been bullied the entire day by the ruler of the castle. His latest attempt at kidnapping Princess Peach had gone horribly awry, like always. The green, spiky shelled, yellow bodied, green faced, yellow snouted, white underbellied, red haired, evil eyed beast who inhabited this castle was named Bowser. His Koopas were in a state of fear, like they always were after a plan of Bowser's goes wrong..

...They were constantly in a state of fear.

"GRAAAH!" He breathed fire as he yelled in frustration, burning a

helpless Koopa who had gotten him a drink. "That Mario...I can NEVER win with him around. I make plan..." he swung his tail, nearly hitting a Koopaling, "...after plan..." he swung his tail again, the Koopaling ducking this swing, "...after plan!" He swing his tail another time, and the Koopaling slid his head back into his shell. The poor turtle lifted his head back out and let out a sigh of relief...before Bowser purposely pounded him straight into the ground with his fist.

"I've tried the basic kidnapping, I've tried hiding in castles, I've tried my airboat, I've tried recruiting numerous villains, I've tried kidnapping OTHER princesses, I've tried paintings, I've tried going into space, I've tried turning her into a trophy, heck I remember being a BABY trying to hurt the brats...but nothing works. Nothing works at all. It's as if life is telling me to stop. I can't kidnap her...without MARIO and his sniveling coward brother Luigi stopping me! There HAS to be SOMEWAY...SOMETHING I haven't tried and done..."

Bowser paced around as his minions tried their best to keep him happy...or as happy as he was going to get that day.

* * *

><p>The party had lasted three hours after the sun had left the sky and the moon rose up in it's place. No one had wanted to leave, but then again it was kind of hard to enjoy a party when everyone was tired and half the Toads drunk on root beer. Princess Daisy and her guests had been the first to leave, travelling back to her kingdom of Sarsaland. Wario and Waluigi were caught a few times trying to sneak back into the party, but were booted out. Yoshi had wandered off halfway through, chasing a butterfly that had somehow fluttered into the castle. Mario decided to go looking for him in the morning, the little dinosaur was more than capable of looking after himself if he ran into any goombas or koopas<p>

And as for the guests of honour, the Mario Brothers were some of the last to leave. After thanking the princess for everything and saying their goodbyes to the Toads, Mario and Luigi departed for home. It was a rather long walk, even longer without Yoshi to ride on, but they made it back alright. As they approached the mushroom styled house they shared, the brothers discussed the days events.

"Sure was a great party, huh Luigi" Mario summed it all up.

"Sure was, Mario. It's-a nice to be appreciated for a change" Luigi said dreamily.

"People always appreciate us though" Mario pointed out.

"They always appreciate you, half the time though it feels like no-one even knows-a who I am. Even Bowser calls me Mr Green, or Greenstache most of the time" Luigi corrected mopily. Mario patted him on the back.

"There there bro. Maybe some people forget, but I sure appreciate you" Mario said kindly. Luigi smiled.

"Gee, thanks Mario" Luigi replied. The brothers walked on in silence for a moment before Luigi brought up another subject "Bowser's been

attacking an awful lot lately. I mean, I know he's always attacking, but lately it's become nearly a daily thing with him. You'd think he'd give us a break once in a while"

"Yeah, Bowser's a stubborn old turtle, but I'm not complaining. It gives my life purpose to toss him around by the tail" Mario commented eagerly.

"Sure, but I could sure use a vacation every once in a while. I'm still sore from that last magic blast Kamek shot me with" Luigi said while rubbing his hip with a pained expression. Mario considered his words for a moment then gave a shrug.

"I suppose a little break now and again would be nice. But I'm good either way" Mario said "Right now though, I do need a nap"

"Here, here" Luigi chimed in agreement. The Mario brothers made it to the door to their house, Mario reached for the handle...

And then an electric shock pulsed through his body and Mario fell on his backside. Luigi stared at Mario in shock, and then looked back at the handle. Mario rubbed his head and looked up, only to find himself and Luigi surrounded by a half dozen magikoopas (Koopas wearing blue wizarding robes), being supported by a few normal green shelled koopas and brown mushroom creatures known as goombas. The evil minions laughed sinisterly as Mario looked between them in uncertainty.

"An ambush huh... that's a new one" Mario commented nonchalantly as he stood up and wiped dust off his shoulders.

"Mario of the Mushroom Kingdom, by order of Bowser, king of the koopas and lord of Darkland, I hereby place you and your brother under arrest! Resistance shall result in a most painful beating" The lead magikoopa declared in a dignified, lordly voice. The rest of the minions did not share this, rather they all jeered like a bunch of rowdy hicks and called for Mario's head. While Luigi wore a cautious look, Mario simply hummed calmly.

"Under arrest huh? Could you come back tomorrow, I really don't feel like taking a tour of the koopa jail this evening" Mario quipped, much to the childish anger of the magikoopa.

"This is NOT your decision! I have an official statement from King Bowser Koopa, signed by Kamek, hand of the king, calling for your arrest! You can not simply refuse an order from the king!" The refinement in the magikoopas voice slipped away with each word he spoke. Mario merely smiled and stretched his legs.

"True. But there's just one problem" Mario said, cracking his knuckles "Bowser's not my king"

The magikoopa fumed

"Seize them!" he roared, and all at once the koopas and goombas charged forth. Mario and Luigi exchanged nods and jumped up, landing on two koopas. The frightened turtles slipped back into their shells, which Mario and Luigi kicked at the goombas, who were all sent flying and disappeared in a puff of smoke. All before the Mario brothers had hit the ground.

"What the-Magikoopa brigade class 32-B, fire at will!" The lead magikoopa declared. The other five magikoopas pulled out white wands with multi-coloured gems at the tips, which they held back while charging their spells. Mario and Luigi paused for a moment, then right as the wizarding turtles unleashed the full might of their attacks, they barrel rolled out of the way, the blasts instead crashed into the remaining normal koopas and sent them spinning off upside down.

Still trying to comprehend their screw up, the magikoopas were left open to attack from Mario and Luigi. Luigi hopped onto the face of the magikoopa on the far left, kicking him hard into the side of the house, while Mario swerved and punched the magikoopa on the right in the jaw, with enough force to send him flying back into the other three. The magikoopa Luigi had kicked into the wall shook off the impact, but he was then immediately squashed by the four Mario had struck as they also crashed against the wall.

The leader of the failed ambush squad could only gape in open-mouthed shock at what had just transpired. In just thirty seconds flat, the Mario brothers had completely demolished his troops, without breaking a sweat! And now they were throwing him warning looks. Gripping the hilt of his wand, the magikoopa realized he only had two choices. He could stand and fight 'til the bitter end, hoping by some miracle he would succeed... or he could run away screaming like a little girl. Obviously he chose the latter.

The Mario Bros watched the fleeing magikoopa in amusement. Luigi laughed.

"And they say I'm-a coward" Luigi said with a laugh. Suddenly, one of the defeated magikoopas piled up near the house managed to wriggle free of the group, only to trip over and drop his wand, which sent out a magic bolt that landed right next to where Luigi was standing, making a loud BANG noise. Luigi screamed at the top of his lungs and leapt into Mario's arms, clutching onto his brother for dear life. Mario had an embarrassed look on his face, but showed no other sign of aggravation as he pulled Luigi off of him and placed him back on his feet. Mario turned to the magikoopas, who all looked fearful and used their magic to teleport away. The green shelled koopas at the other side of the lawn also ran away.

"Well, we sure-a showed them, right Mario" Luigi said confidently, hoping to shrug off his humiliating moment back there. He noticed that Mario wasn't listening to him, rather he was thinking deeply.

"Something doesn't seem right about this. A plain ambush isn't really Bowser's style, and if he did intend to capture us he'd want to do it himself, and he'd at least bring the koopalings. I'm sure he must have known that little stunt would never have worked" Mario expressed his views. Luigi nodded, catching on.

"So then capturing us wasn't the objective, he must-a have something else in mind" Luigi said.

"You want my guess, this was a distraction" Mario replied. Luigi nodded in agreement.

"But from what though?"

BANG!

BOOM!

BANG AGAIN!

The Mario brothers jumped in shock and turned to face the direction of the castle in the distance, which they could see was under attack from an armada of flying ships, lead by an especially large one called the Doomship. All belonging to you know who.

"... I'm guessing that" Mario answered Luigi's question. The Brothers stared blankly at the distant scene for a moment before Mario's expression hardened and he began to run forward "Come on Luigi, we've gotta stop that crazy koopa before he makes off with the princess again!"

Luigi quickly followed after Mario, though somewhat reluctantly.

"Twice in one day, boy, that guy must really be getting desperate" Luigi said, thinking longingly of his bed "I hope we get more medals for this, because I really don't want to be doing this so late"

"Maybe we can sleep in at the castle, there's always a few spare bedrooms there. Now let's-a move it!" Mario called urgently, and the heroes of the Mushroom Kingdom ran at top speed down the path to the castle. They only slowed down momentarily so Luigi could ask a question.

"Shouldn't we go pick Yoshi up if we're-a facing Bowser's whole koopa troop?"

"Not enough time. Besides, he's probably asleep somewhere, best not to wake the little guy" Mario replied without missing a pace.

"I envy that dinosaur" Luigi sighed, but kept up with Mario.

* * *

><p>However, little did the Mario brothers know Yoshi wasn't asleep. Actually, he was still chasing that same butterfly from earlier through a field of flowers, just far enough away from the castle that he didn't hear the explosions. The saddled dinosaur laughed as he jumped up and down, trying to catch the butterfly in his hands. It would have been much easier if he used his tongue, but then he would impulsively swallow it. And Yoshi didn't want to eat the butterfly, he just wanted to play with it.<p>

Up and down Yoshi leapt, landing softly each time in a different flower bed. For a while Yoshi was happy and carefree, oblivious to all but the pretty blue butterfly...

And then he landed in a thorny rose bush.

"YOSHI!" Yoshi screamed in pain, running around in circles as he tried to shake off the stinging pain in his tail and rear. After half

a minute of this routine he finally skidded to a stop and shook about wildly, causing the thorns to fly off of his skin. Once finally free of the stinging nuisance Yoshi sighed and pranced off, forgetting his experience almost instantly as he began skipping happily through the flowers. Yoshi could have played right up until midnight before falling asleep in the comfiest flower bed he could find.

That is, if he didn't catch sight of something particularly unusual.

Hidden behind a high rose bush, Yoshi spied a blond human girl in a blue spotted dress, wandering through the flowers and looking very lost and uncertain. Yoshi made a funny face, a dinosaur of very little brains the Toad children sometimes innocently called him, but even he knew that human beings weren't a common sight here in the Mushroom Kingdom. Outside of the caveman village in Dinosaur land, the only humans Yoshi had even seen in his life were Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Princess Daisy, Wario and Waluigi. So where did this girl come from?

And while Yoshi may have been clueless as to her identity, I'm sure we all know she's Sally Brown, right? Well, if you didn't, you do now.

Sally observed her strange surrounding with a mixture of wonder, and worry. She had no idea what had just happened to her. One moment her brother was standing victorious against that creep Joe Agate, and the next second she was dragged through a dark portal. That memory sent shivers down her spine every time she thought of it. Though truthfully she only remembered the first few seconds where she was surrounded by darkness. She thought she remembered Peppermint Patty grabbing onto her to pull her out, but she must have lost her grip or let go, because Sally had seen no sign of her since. There was a big blank in her memory at that point, the last she could remember was waking up in a bed of strange flowers.

After that, Sally had just laid there for a while, struggling to remember what had just happened, and then struggling with comprehending it. She still didn't fully understand it, but she realized she was never going to get anywhere laying in the flowers, so she decided to get up and explore. So far that wasn't doing her much good either. She had no clue where on earth she was. And actually, if the floating yellow blocks with question marks on the sides were any clue, she might not even BE on earth. That thought, that she might be-no, definitely was-on another world, initially led her to squeal "Wow!" and then after a few seconds for the thought to sink in she added "Good grief!"

So yeah, now she was lost, torn away from her friends and brother, AND she was on another world. Trapped, most likely. She still didn't know how this happened, but she didn't need to know that to freak out. And freak out she did. Sally ran around screaming, huddled up on the ground hyperventilating, and said a prayer. After that was done she calmed down a bit, but only a little. How was she to stay even the slightest bit calm in this situation anyway, she was lost on another world!

Sally sighed.

"It's now official, bad luck runs in the family" Sally told herself

grumpily. She knew it was considered weird to talk to herself, but with all that was going on, she really didn't care to keep her thoughts bottled up inside her head "I mean really, how unlucky can I get. Stuck on another world with no way to get home? Ooh, if I find Joe Agate, I'm going to... get my butt kicked for trying to slug him probably. Grr, this stinks" Sally came across a block that had apparently fallen out of the air and sat on it, pouting.

Yoshi continued to watch Sally from behind the bush. He wasn't quite sure what she was talking about, but he did notice she was upset about something. So, as was his nature, the little dinosaur decided to go cheer her up. He hopped over the rose bush and walked right up to her. Sally looked up from the ground right into Yoshi's face, the green dinosaur smiled at her and casually said "Yoshi"

For a moment Sally just stared cluelessly at Yoshi. Then she let out a shriek and fell backwards off the rock. Yoshi scratched his head, then apparently thinking she was playing a game he copied Sally's actions and fell back on the ground, adding his own squeal to further mimic her.

Sally pushed herself up slightly and took another look at Yoshi, who also got up and flashed her a toothy grin. Not the best move, Sally squealed and crawled away, hiding behind another bush with a smiley face.

"Don't eat me!" Sally yelled in fear. Again confused by her actions, Yoshi got up and waddled over to her. Sally, not wanting to seem like too much of a coward, picked up a nearby stone and held it up threateningly while backing away carefully.

"I'm warning you, stay away or I'll hurt you, you-you-whatever sort of dinosaur you are" Sally threatened.

"Yoshi" Was Yoshi's simple response. Apparently at her wits end, Sally threw the rock full force at Yoshi's face... missing him by a mile.

"... I'm even more like my brother than I thought" Sally sighed. Yoshi stared off in the direction Sally had thrown the rock, then turned back to her with a smile. Sally gulped as Yoshi continued to close in on her. She backed away, trying to make herself look threatening as she did so, but this attempt was ruined when she tripped on another rock and fell on her behind.

Finally starting to realise he was making her nervous, Yoshi grabbed a few nearby daffodils and held them out to Sally as he got up close. Surprised by this, and realising that Yoshi in all did not look very threatening, she cautiously accepted the flowers from him.

"Um... thanks" Sally said uncertainly. Yoshi clapped like a happy child.

"Yosh, Yoshi!" He cheered. Sally was left to scratch her head. What kind of crazy world had she landed on?

* * *

><p>Somewhere around the centre of the path between The Castle and Toad Town, the capital of the Mushroom Kingdom despite it's

relatively small size, a light portal popped up. Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock hopped out, and the portal vanished shortly after. Charlie Brown and the animals shook off a short dizzy spell and then marvelled at the lush green landscapes of the kingdom, accommodated by several of the worlds quirks like the floating blocks, enormous multi coloured pipes and the unusual creatures that roamed the lands.<p>

"Wow, this is incredible" Charlie Brown gaped. He had been given a summary of the Mushroom World, along with a few others by Sparky the night before he'd fought Joe Agate back home, so he'd thought he knew completely what to expect when he arrived here. But seeing the world and it's beauty first hand... that was something else completely.

While the three of them were gawking at the landscape, Sparky rose up out of Charlie Brown's head and hovered down by his side. Noticing the stupefied look on his successor's face he smiled and nodded.

"It's all seems much more amazing when you see it for yourself, doesn't it?" Sparky asked rhetorically, though Charlie Brown nodded in response anyway "Trust me, the thrill never wears off"

"You know, even after all I've been through already, I still can't believe I'm actually on another world" Charlie Brown replied, only half consciously "I mean, this just really boggles the mind. This is a whole other world than the one I've always known, and it's still only a small part of what's really out there. Everything that people think they know about the universe, how it all works... no one's even come close to figuring out what's really out there. I just can't believe it..."

Sparky nodded again, he stayed silent for a moment to let everything sink in further before he responded "It is mind blowing, that's the main reason I've stayed out of matters which are not utterly world threatening. I mean no offense, but mortal minds can only comprehend so much. If all the people in all the worlds really knew the full magnitude of this reality, I don't know if they could all handle it. It makes me worry to think that now more and more people will be forced to come to terms with it, now that a universal war looms on the horizon" Sparky stared off distantly for a while before shaking his head "But that is not so much a present concern. Right now what matters is finding Sally and Patty, or at least the Mario brothers"

Charlie Brown nodded, and as hard as it was to put aside the sense of wonder and the curiosity to explore, Charlie Brown knew that finding Sally and Peppermint Patty was the most important thing.

"So... how do we find them again?" Charlie Brown asked. Sparky hummed thoughtfully.

"It is among your abilities to track people down, but we didn't have enough time to practise this. If I'd known we'd be in this situation before your friends were abducted I would have taught you the other night. But there's no sense moping. Tracking is a rather difficult technique to master however, so this process might take some time" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown sighed in exasperation.

"I could have guessed" Charlie Brown said dejectedly. Sparky patted him on the shoulder.

"It's alright Charlie Brown, assuming Joe Agate's still worn out from your last battle I'd say we have plenty of time to work on this. And remember, happy thoughts, that's the secret to using your powers" Sparky stressed. Charlie Brown gave a half hearted smile as a response, which Sparky replied with an awkward "A bit happier than that..."

While Sparky began instructing Charlie Brown on how to use his powers to sense Peppermint Patty and Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock wandered off a bit to get a closer look at the world. They soon came across a set of floating blocks, which caught their attention. Snoopy jumped up and grabbed onto the side of the block, climbing on top, using it as a lookout post. Woodstock intended to fly up after him, but the little bird's clumsy flying caused him to bonk his head against the bottom of the block. Snoopy was suddenly propelled through the air by a strange force, landing on the ground near where Woodstock had fallen. Snoopy shook his head, and noticed a gold coin fall on the ground before him. His eyes widening curiously, Snoopy sat up and grabbed the coin, eyeing it closely. He bit into the coin and gave it a sniff. Then his tail began wagging.

"Good gosh, it is-SOLID GOLD!"_ Snoopy exclaimed. Woodstock perked up upon hearing this, he hopped up onto Snoopy's elbow and took a good look at the coin. Then he cheered, and the two friends began to dance _"We're rich, we're rich, we're rich!"._

After a few minutes of their jolly fun the two stopped to wonder where the gold came from. Instinctively they both looked up at the floating block, which had now turned brown and blank on all sides. Devising a theory, Snoopy walked underneath a second question marked block and jumped, bonking his head against the bottom. After landing Snoopy rubbed his head to ease the pain, but he forgot it hurt completely when he saw a second gold coin fell down near him. Snoopy smiled from ear to ear.

"Woodstock, these blocks are all full of gold coins. You know what this means right? We bonk our heads against a few more of these things, and we're set for life! We can buy anything we want, a solid gold dog dish, a perfect nest, a new sopwich camel the Red Baron can't shoot down, anything! We've got it made!"_ Woodstock cheered in unison with his beagle buddy as they both began joyfully bashing blocks, quickly gathering up a huge pile of coins for themselves. Back with Charlie Brown and Sparky, the former had his hands on his head in a meditative manner, while the latter was observing him. Sparky looked over for a moment to the direction Snoopy and Woodstock were, and saw them bashing blocks and squealing with happiness as gold coins poured out. Sparky smiled lightly, not having the heart to go over and tell them the gold coins were actually only worth about a dollar apiece.

After amassing a three foot tall and four feet wide pile of gold coins Snoopy and Woodstock stopped to jump in it. The two animals swam around in the gold, laughing all the time. A shadow suddenly appeared over the two. Snoopy failed to notice because he had his eyes closed, but Woodstock opened his and noticed the figure standing above them. He stopped dead in fear, eyes gone as wide as they could get. Snoopy swam past, still laughing, and Woodstock pulled at his

ear to get his attention. Snoopy opened his eyes and noticed aswell the figure standing over them.

Meanwhile, Charlie Brown was still in his meditative stance, straining himself to sense the aura's of his friend and sister.

"Feel anything yet?" Sparky asked.

"Just an itch on the back of my head" Charlie Brown replied dejectedly.

"Keep at it, I did say it takes time right" Sparky nodded. Charlie Brown continued to strain himself, but his concentration was ruined when the sound of a dozen explosions sounded off in the distance, and he jumped.

"What was that?!" Charlie Brown asked, looking around fearfully. Sparky, knowing full well what that explosion must mean, looked over to the Mushroom Castle to the North of where they stood, and noticed that it was currently under attack by a platoon of flying koopa ships. Sparky frowned and turned to his apprentice.

"It would appear the Mushroom Castle is under attack. We'd best go along to defend it, this is the opportune chance for us to recruit Mario and Luigi, as well as being your responsibility to defend the kingdom" Sparky explained. Charlie Brown looked on at the castle being surrounded by flying ships. He sighed, wishing among other things that he could just stick to finding his friends, but knew that it was indeed his responsibility to help out. And even if it wasn't, he couldn't just not try to help out. He covered his hands and feet with light and prepared to fly off, when Snoopy and Woodstock suddenly ran up and started pulling at his legs and arms, screaming in terror and barking or tweeting out warnings. Charlie Brown looked down at them oddly, then looked over to the direction at which Snoopy was pointing. There was a flash of red light which struck him dead on in the chest, sending the guardian of light flying back ten feet. The animals gasped as even Sparky was shocked. He looked to the attacker, a magikoopa. An old magikoopa possibly, though he didn't look that much different from most others, though he did have a look of authority about him.

"Aha, now I have you Mario brot-hey, hold on. You're not the Mario brothers?" The magikoopa observed, giving the group uncertain looks. A bit further away Charlie Brown sat up and clutched his stomach. That blast left him feeling oddly woozy and out of puff. After glancing over to make sure his successor was alright, Sparky glared at the magikoopa.

"Kamek, I presume. Bowser's right hand koopa?" Sparky summarised. Kamek floated up in a prideful manner.

"I am the advisor to King Bowser Koopa, king of Darkland and future overlord of the Mushroom Kingdom and all other Kingdoms of the Mushroom World. And who are you knaves, I was stationed here to hold back the Mario brothers. State your business crossing this way" The magikoopa, now identified as Kamek commanded.

"I am Sparky, former Guardian of light. And that boy you just attacked was my successor, Charlie Brown. And we're here to find

Charlie's friends and recruit the Mario brothers to our cause of protecting the universe. But first we're going to go foil your master's little invasion plan" Sparky told him the honest truth. Kamek glared at him.

"Is that so?" The old koopa wizard questioned "Well, any potential ally to the Mario brothers is an enemy to the Koopa's. I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you all captive"

Snoopy and Woodstock, though initially worried about the magikoopa, had quickly gotten over themselves, and even started to laugh at the wizard.

"Yeah right pal, my owner over there is unstoppable. You'd need an army to bring him down"_ Snoopy thought in a gloating tone. As though he had read the beagle's thought kamek glared at him and waved his wand about. As Charlie Brown had started to get up, still feeling oddly dizzy from that spell he'd been hit with, several clouds of smoke suddenly rose up around them. And when the smoke cleared, Charlie Brown found himself surrounded by Koopa Troopas, Goombas, two Hammer Bros (Koopas with helmets that seemed to have an endless supply of hammers on hand at all times), three short humanoid's in red hooded cloaks wearing white masks, called Shy Guys, and a glasses wearing koopa referred to as a Lakitu sitting on a cloud floating above him. Charlie Brown gaped at the sudden appearance of these enemies. Woodstock gave Snoopy a stern look, and the beagle smiled meekly and blushed.

"Alright boys, pound him into the ground!" Kamek squawked at the minions, who all glared at Charlie Brown (Though it was hard to tell with the Shy Guys) and prepared to move in. Charlie Brown wasn't as scared as he might have been, after coming out the victor against someone like Joe Agate he felt he could probably handle a few of these minions. He clutched his stomach again, why did it still hurt?

A goomba charged head forth to slam into Charlie Brown, who floated over it and struck it in the back with a light beam. The goomba screamed for a second before disappearing in a puff of smoke, confusing Charlie Brown, providing the right distraction for one of the Hammer Brothers to throw one of their signature weapons at his head. Charlie Brown fell back onto the ground, and a trio of koopas tried to body slam him. They instead landed on the light shield Charlie Brown conjured up, and send flying thirty feet into the air as Charlie Brown mentally urged the shield to rise up. When the shield vanished the force of it's rise caused the koopa trio to go flying off in the distance.

Charlie Brown smiled in satisfaction, but was immediately tackled from behind by another goomba. Charlie Brown flipped around and struck the brown mushroom creature in the face with a light punch, causing it to poof out of existence like it's buddy earlier.

Snoopy and Woodstock cheered for Charlie Brown on the sidelines, while Kamek just looked stoic. Sparky however was looking cautious.

"Yeah, give 'em heck!"_ Snoopy yelled like a rabid wrestling fan, while Woodstock wore one of those oversized novelty hands on his right wing and waved a yellow flag with a black zigzag pattern with

the other. Kamek glanced at the cheering animals briefly then turned back to the fight, where Charlie Brown had just finished knocking out two of the Shy Guys. He was preparing a light sphere to take out the third when an orange spiked ball suddenly landed on his head. The sudden hit clearly stunned Brown as the sphere in his hand dissipated, and the back of his head was left bleeding for a moment as the spiked ball, revealed to have been some sort of curled up tortoise, fell onto the floor and began to walk away. Snoopy and Woodstock's cheering stopped abruptly and they both made uneasy noises. Kamek smiled deviously.

Back to Charlie Brown, the young Guardian rubbed the back of his head, which had stopped bleeding already as a result of his healing ability. He looked up to see where that tortoise had come from, and saw the Lakitu drop two more his way. Charlie Brown dodged the attack, but ran right into a hammer as a result. Charlie Brown shook off the pain and got up, only to be tackled down by two more koopas, who attempted to punch his out. He kicked them both off and knocked them out, dodged another hammer and shot the first of the hammer bros with a light beam. The koopa went flying back a few metres, but it's partner snuck up behind Charlie Brown with another hammer in hand. Before Charlie Brown could react he was struck in the back with surprising force, falling to the ground on his face.

Charlie Brown looked up painfully at the approaching enemies. Two koopas, one goomba, one shy guy, a hammer brother, and that lakitu still up in the air. Should have been easy, they weren't much stronger than those synthetic heartless back in the training room. So, why was he having such a hard time fighting them? Maybe it had something to do with this sickening feeling he was developing in the pit of his stomach, and that he wasn't moving as fast as he normally was. What was happening to him?

Back with the onlookers, Sparky was also realizing this discrepancy. He turned to Kamek and asked "What kind of spell did you strike Charlie with?"

Kamek smiled proudly "It's a little something I've been researching for use against Mario. It's a high powered stunning spell that leaves the victim feeling woosy and eventually caused them to become immobile. Funny thing is though, the effect is supposed to take place within a few seconds, this kid of yours must be very, very strong to hold out this long against it, especially if he's straining himself fighting that troop"

Sparky mentally groaned. He'd heard of this spell before, but he thought it was a long forgotten technique. Showed that Kamek really did his homework. The good thing was, with Charlie Brown's healing powers the spell wouldn't completely affect him and should wear off within a few minutes. That is, if he didn't get completely clobbered by the minions while he was still weakened. Sparky supposed it didn't help that his powers were probably not at their best after the shock of losing his friends. The spirit put his hands together and prayed for the best.

Charlie Brown coughed and covered his fist with light. The one remaining goomba growled lightly and ran forward, preparing to tack the hero again. But right before it could make contact it was suddenly flattened by a falling red and blue figure. Charlie Brown blinked in surprise, and after registering what just happened he saw

that his saviour was a petite man in blue overalls with a red shirt and hat. The man looked down at Charlie Brown and smiled, telling him without words that he was going to be ok.

While Charlie Brown smiled and sighed, the koopa troop were in a panic at the appearance of this man, and even Kamek let loose a frightened exclamation.

"Wha-what!? Mario!" Kamek yelled.

"That's-a my name, don't-a wear it out" Mario cheerfully replied to the magikoopa. Snoopy and Woodstock sighed with relief while Sparky also felt immensely relieved at the all-too-convenient timing.

Mario turned to the remaining minions, who had all backed away in fear. The hammer brother managed to regain his courage and ran forth, only to be tripped up by an outstretched leg, which the helmeted koopa soon saw to be Luigi's. The younger but taller Mario bro waved his hand pleasantly at the Hammer bro before picking up one of his fallen hammers and bashing him on the head with it. The Hammer Bro was immediately knocked out, stars circling around his head.

The remaining four minions looked on in terror, but managed to pluck up the courage to attack anyway. The two koopas ran up in front of the two Mario brothers and began mimicking the Muhammad Ali shuffle, throwing a few fake punches to fool them. The Mario bros responded by punching the two turtles in the face, sending them crawling back into their shells. Mario picked up the shell of his opponent, spun it around and hurled it at the Shy Guy, who was sent spinning off into the distance with the koopa. The Lakitu floated above and tried to drop a barrage of spiked turtles on top of the heroes. Luigi pulled an umbrella out of thin air and held it above their heads, and for some ridiculous reason the turtles all just bounced off of it without making a puncture. The cloud flying turtle scratched his head at this development, as Mario jumped up onto Luigi's outstretched palms. The younger Mario brother tossed Mario into the air with all his strength, Mario flew right above the Lakitu and then landed down on his head, knocking him out.

With the Lakitu out cold Mario seemed to take control of the cloud and had it float down to the ground, where the red and blue clad hero jumped down to re-join Luigi. The Mario brothers looked over the remaining fallen minions and high fived each other. But then a sudden blast of green energy struck Luigi and sent him twirling through the air, landing in a bush. A thorny bush. Mario winced before turning to the attacker, a very pi##ed off Kamek.

"Must you two always get in my way?" The magikoopa asked, sounding more like a cranky old man than normal. Mario gave him a stern look and knelted down, ready to make a dash.

"Well, yes. That's what we do" Mario said. The hero and villain glared at each other, staring one another down. Mario made the first move, running forward with his fist held back. Kamek launched a red blast, the same attack he had used on Charlie Brown earlier. Mario avoided it with a backflip and kept going. He leapt and prepared to slug Kamek in the mouth, when the magikoopa suddenly shrunk himself into a round ball and zoomed off in another direction. Mario landed, and a quick glance over his shoulder confirmed Kamek had teleported behind him, charging up a spell. Mario had little time to react as

Kamek launched an enormous energy bolt down at him, the plumber managed to avoid the brunt of the attack with a jump, but the shockwave of the blast sent him flying high. Very unsteadily, Mario regained his positioning in the fall and managed to land on his feet, though he barely managed to not trip over in doing so. Mario looked back to see Kamek had gone, and instinctively he rolled out of the way of another attack from behind.

Back with Charlie Brown, the light guardian was re-joined by Snoopy, Woodstock and Sparky, all checking up on his health. If the white light engulfing his body and his more at ease stance were any indication, the effects of Kamek's spell were wearing off. Sparky sighed at this.

"Feeling better then?" Sparky asked, feeling obliged to do so. Charlie Brown shook the last bit of dizziness out of his head and nodded.

"Yeah, feel much better now" Charlie Brown replied. He watched on as Mario continued to dodge Kamek's attacks, getting pretty close to landing a few hits several times but always missing as the old magikooa expertly avoided them. Likewise, a few of the spells Kamek cast at Mario nearly made contact, but Mario managed to avoid getting a full on hit every time, and eventually landed a punch to Kamek's chin, which earned him a magor scolding and a dozen more magic blasts sent his way. Charlie Brown admired their precision.

"Is he Mario?" Charlie Brown asked, Sparky nodded in confirmation "He's really good"

"Well, he has had a decade and a half of practise. Weaker minions like those he just fought are hardly an effort for him, someone as skilled as Kamek's a little more difficult but he'll come out victorious soon enough" Sparky explained.

"Hmm, well then I must be pretty weak to lose to them" Charlie Brown sighed dejectedly. Sparky rolled his eyes and patted his shoulder with his semi-solidified hand.

"No, you were just victim to one of Kamek's cheap shots, really dangerous spell. And let me tell you, there's no way Mario could have recovered from that so fast. If you were at full strength the entire Koopa troupa would be no match for you" Sparky said, consoling Charlie Brown as they continued to spectate the fight.

Mario dodged another explosive attack, but tripped over and landed on his stomach. Kamek grinned at this golden opportunity and charged up a blue spell. But before he could fire, he was struck in the back by something small, painful and VERY HOT. Recoiling from the sudden assault, Kamek flipped around to see Luigi, his costume having suddenly changed to red overalls and white shirt and hat. He was juggling a fireball in his right hand, and looking at Kamek with a smug expression.

"We had time to grab a few power ups on the way" Luigi explained. Kamek scowled and fired a magic bolt at Luigi, who dodged to the left. The younger twin hopped and ducked over several more magic blasts as he threw a few more fireballs at Kamek, with the magikooa barely dodging them all, one even tore a flaming took off and incinerated his wizards hat. Kamek appeared to take that as a great

personal insult, he charged up his wand again and launched a stream of water Luigi's way. Luigi jumped to the right, but at the last minute the stream of water swerved and hit him head on anyway. Luigi was thrown against a rock to struggle against the current of water, an odd sound effect echoed and Luigi's clothes flickered back to their typical colouring.

When the water finally stopped pouring out of his wand Kamek took a moment to laugh at the dazed Luigi and charged up a red spell. He heard Mario running up behind him, the elder brother did a running jump and prepared to land down upon Kamek's head, but was instead hit in the stomach by the koopa's magic bolt, and he fell back and skidded on the ground. Mario shook his head and looked up to see Kamek preparing another blast, a victorious scowl on his face. He was promptly sent flying by a light beam to the back.

Mario did a double take at what just happened, and looked to see Charlie Brown with his glowing hand outstretched. He had decided now looked like a very good time to get back into the fight. Mario was surprised by the boy's power, having not seen him in action before the koopas knocked him down. But he didn't question it, he just smiled, happy to have a bit more back up. He gave Charlie Brown a thumbs up and looked over at Luigi, who was just getting up himself. Luigi staggered about a bit, but ultimately he proved himself alright. Mario got up and together with Luigi went to confront Kamek.

The koopa wizard grabbed his head to stop it from spinning and looked up to see what hit him, but instead saw Mario and Luigi assuming fighting stances, a glowing Charlie Brown flying forth to join them. Kamek's eyes widened enough that you could just about see them under his glasses. One of his skills as a high ranking magikoopa was the ability to sense power in others, and now that he had a proper look at Charlie Brown he realised that the boy's power dwarfed his own, by a few hundred times perhaps. With a gulp, Kamek backed off.

"You can go now Kamek. Go-a tell Bowser we're-a on our way to deliver his butt kicking" Mario instructed. Kamek glared at him, but with Charlie Brown floating over him... no, no he wouldn't risk it. Kamek whistled loudly, and a broomstick appeared in the sky and hovered down next to him. Kamek hopped aboard and flew off into the distance. The rest of the minions were just about regaining consciousness, and noticing their commander was making a break for it they quickly followed suit.

Mario and Luigi cheered for their victory and turned to Charlie Brown, having to cover their eyes a bit due to the light emanating off of him. Charlie Brown realised how brightly he was glowing and turned it off like a light bulb, dropping to the ground. Mario relaxed his eyes and patted Charlie Brown on the back.

"Thanks for the help there kid. Say, what's-a your name?" Mario asked.

"I'm Charlie Brown. I'm... not from around here" Charlie Brown wasn't quite sure how to put it.

"Obviously, I think-a we'd know if there were any other humans like us around here" Luigi commented. He held out his hand for Charlie Brown to shake it, as did Mario, and asked "So kid, where-a you

from?"

"Umm..." Charlie Brown mumbled, earning two raised eyebrows. Sparky floated in with Snoopy and Woodstock.

"It's a long story, you got a minute?" Sparky asked. Mario and Luigi hummed thoughtfully, turning in the direction of the castle, which was still coming under heavy fire in the distance.

"Well you're gonna have ta be quick, we'sa got a princess to save" Mario insisted. Sparky nodded, and began to explain everything that he thought the Mario brothers needed to know about. He explained about the Guardians, his sister, the upcoming war against the darkness, Charlie Brown's lost friends and how they were here to find them as well as recruit the Mario brothers. Said heroes hummed thoughtfully while trying to take this all in.

"Just when you think you've seen everything, huh Mario" Luigi said, Mario nodded.

"I guess there's always more to reality than what you make of it" Mario commented.

"So you believe us?" Charlie Brown asked. The Mario bros nodded.

"We're-a willing to believe anything these days. So, I guess you want-a our help in all this craziness?" Mario replied.

"Well, yeah, that would be appreciated" Charlie Brown nodded. Mario looked at Luigi, though the younger Mario brother sighed at the thought of getting thrown into a war he nodded anyway, knowing he'd get involved one way or another. Mario smiled and gave Charlie Brown's group a thumbs up.

"We're in" Mario accepted, much to the relief of Charlie Brown's group "-If-a you help us save the castle"

"Ok then, we were just on our way to do that anyway" Charlie Brown said "And after that we can go looking for my friends, right?"

"Well, it's a bit late, so Luigi might just go to bed, but we'll-a do what we can" Mario replied, pleasing Charlie Brown.

The conversation was interrupted by more explosions in the distance which shook the ground.

"I think we should all be heading to the castle now" Sparky recommended, earning a nod from everyone present as the team, now with the invaluable addition of the Mario Brothers, ran forth to liberate the castle from the Koopas.

* * *

><p>(Mushroom Castle, shortly before koopas assault)<p>

Princess Peach was strolling through the throne room in her castle, where the duration of the party had been held. Right now her various Toad servants were busy taking down all the decorations and putting

away the tables. A few of the Toads stood on ladders to remove the banners that had been hung up. Trampolines had been placed at the foot of each ladder, and a beanbag next to the trampolines. This meant that if a Toad fell off the ladder they would safely bounce into the beanbag unharmed. Turned out to be a great strategy, as the Toads did fall off a lot. In fact, it got to the point where they actually fell off intentionally when they were done, as a quicker alternative to climbing down. That was what they were like, always finding fun ways to do things.

As the Toads were busy, the princess discussed matters with Toadsworth and Toad, her two most loyal subjects.

"-And thus we may not be plunged into bankruptcy" Toadsworth said, having spent the last twenty minutes discussing the financial implications this party would have on the kingdom.

"That's nice Toadsworth" Peach replied. Though in truth both she and Toad had lost track of what he was saying just two minutes into the one sided discussion; Toadsworth had a habit of going on and on, and discussing every little matter in great detail when talking about royal matters, to the point that it sometimes became easy to lose track of what he was saying. But neither the princess or Toad had the heart to tell him that.

"Sooo... that cake was sure good, wasn't it" Toad piped up, wanting to change the subject to something that wouldn't get Toadsworth drabbling on.

"Hmm? Ah yes, most scrumptious indeed. I must say my dear princess, your baking prowess is phenomenal" Toadsworth complimented. Peach giggled appreciatively.

"Oh, I'm not all that good. I can never get the frosting quite right, I always use too much or too little" Peach insisted, ever the humble one.

"Still yummy either way. I just wish I had room for another bite" Toad said joyfully, patting his full belly.

"Yes, but while the cake was delicious I'm afraid we do have more important matters to discuss. For example, we need to address the crop shortage this year. I'm afraid we might not have enough corn or carrots to meet consumer demand in our main market areas, and our castles own turnip plantation was devastated by a wriggler infestation recently. Not a good sign" Toadsworth began solemnly.

"This is a problem. Hmm..." Peach placed a finger to her chin in thought, coming to a brief halt to let a few Toad's carrying a stone Mario statue pass by "I hear Grassland has had a great harvest this year, and the king does owe us a favour for when Mario chased off Bowser Jr's last raid there. Perhaps we could ask them to share a few crops"

"That might work, though the king of Grassland is known to be particularly prudent on sharing. Perhaps if we sent Master Luigi as an envoy, I don't think we could spare Mario for that long. Care to give your opinion, Master Toad?" Toad was caught off guard by the older Toad's question.

Toad scratched the back of his cap "Well, gee, I really don't know. I'm just here to be the cutesy sidekick, I haven't got a clue about politics or anything like that. But, um, maybe it'll work, yeah. Ha ha" Toad's face reddened and he looked away impishly. Peach and Toadsworth gave him blank looks.

"I guess we'll go with it" Peach said, suddenly cheery again. Toadsworth nodded as the trio neared the throne and Peach prepared to take her seat.

"I suppose the next item on our agenda is-"

Toadsworth was cut off when the door on the far right side of the room suddenly flew open and a Toad wearing a blue cap with green spots ran up to the princess in a hurry.

"Princess! Princess!" The Toad called breathlessly as he came to a stop before his ruler, panting heavily a few times before taking in one deep breath and saying quickly "We've found something that requires your urgent attention!"

"What is it?" Peach asked curiously.

"Well, it's not so much a something, more like a someone" The green spotted Toad replied, looking as though he had never lost his breath.

"Did Wario and Waluigi break into the vault again?" Toad asked straight away.

"No, it's... well, um... this is going to sound like an odd question, but... well, did you invite any other relatives besides Princess Daisy, princess?" The Toad asked. Peach raised an eyebrow.

"I don't have any other living relatives besides Daisy, so no. Why do you ask?" Princess Peach replied, though she was starting to get an idea of what he was trying to say.

"Well, um... you see, we found-oh, wait, here she comes" The Toad pointed to the doorway leading to the right wing of the castle. Peach, Toad and Toadsworth looked over and saw what had got the blue capped Toad into such a state. A young girl, probably thirteen or fourteen, wearing a green dress and blue shorts as well as sandals. Oh, and she was human aswell.

The eyes of every Toad that saw her grew to the size of dinner plates, in the case of Toadsworth this caused his glasses to go flying off his head. Even the princess was caught of guard. As for the girl herself, she seemed a little less than stupefied with everything she was seeing. She just paced casually around the throne room, staring at all the remaining party decorations and the usual ornaments that filled the room with an excited look.

"Gee, this sure is a swell place you guys live in, what did you say the rent was on one of these castles?" The mousy haired girl asked.

"Well, this castle is traditionally owned by the royal family, but any other castle in the kingdom, and there are a lot, would cost you

about two hundred thousand coins" Said the Toad with the yellow spotted cap walking at her left hand side. He periodically exchanged looks of uncertainty with the similar colour-capped Toad on the girls right.

"Dang, and here I've only got ten bucks. Oh well" The girl said casually.

Princess Peach looked to her two right hands. After a quick exchange between Toad and Toadsworth they both shrugged, which Peach followed with a shrug of her own.

The mousy haired girl continued to look around, eventually passing by the throne and looking at Toad.

"Hey Mac, do you know where the nearest hotels are? I'm kinda stuck here until my friend comes to pick me up" The girl said.

"Mac?" Toad wondered, looking around to see if she was talking to someone else "Um, actually my name is Toad"

"Pleased to me you, Toady" She responded with a handshake.

"Toady?" Toad was again confused.

While Toadsworth was much too confused to do anything, Princess Peach, being a human herself and therefore caught less off guard by the new arrival, walked closer to the girl and addressed her "Excuse me, young lady, are you lost?"

The girl turned to look at the princess and gave her an unconcerned smile "Well, yeah kinda. You must be Princess Peach. I'm Peppermint Patty, nice ta meet you princess"

A lot of the Toads were staring at Patty with even more confusion, so not only was she a human, but she also spoke to the princess as if she were any other common person. Princess Peach for her part didn't mind at all, rather she just wanted to get a clear idea of who this girl was and how she'd gotten here.

"It's nice to meet you too Patty" Princess Peach began sweetly "So, I must ask, how did you get into the castle? Or were you outside the castle when the Toads found you?"

"Is that what they're called? I've been calling them Mushmen" Peppermint Patty said oddly, but put it aside to answer the question "And it's a pretty long story, you get ten minutes?"

"Of course. Please explain" Princess Peach replied. Peppermint Patty took a deep breath and contemplated how she was going to explain her story.

"Well, you see this is how I think it went down. Basically I'm from another world where there are just humans and none of these little mushroom guys around. My friend Chuck just became the Guardian of Light, which makes him sort of a protector of the universe, because the old Guardian Sparky was killed by his evil sister, the Dark Witch, the Guardian of Darkness, who was recently released by this fat egg shaped scientist. The Witch wanted to take over the universe and plunge all the worlds in the Realm of Light into Darkness, but

she can't come into our Realm because of some sort of spell Sparky cast on her millions of years ago. So instead she gave half her powers to Joe Agate, who's this total blockhead jerk from our world. Chuck and Agate fought a life or death battle back in our home town, and of course Chuck kicked his evil butt in the end. But because he was such a sore loser he decided to kidnap me and all of mine and Chuck's other friends by dragging us through these portals of darkness. I'm guessing it didn't work quite as well as he wanted it to, because I came out in your basement rather than the Realm of Darkness. And, that's basically it. Oh, and Chuck's supposed to assemble an army of heroes from across the universe to fight the Witch. Right now I'm guessing I'm stuck here until Chuck comes to pick me up" Peppermint Patty explained without ever missing a beat.

The Toads all stared at Patty, even more dumbfounded than ever by her claims. Princess Peach however merely gave her an expressionless look for a while before it turned to a smile "I believe you"

"You do? Huh, I thought you were gonna think I was crazy. Thanks" Patty replied. Toadsworth looked nervous.

"Dear princess, are you quite certain you can trust her claims? It all sounds pretty confounded to me" Toadsworth tried to reason. Princess Peach shrugged.

"It's no more convoluted than anything else we've all been through before" Peach replied simply.

"She's got you there" Toad nodded to Toadsworth, who had no choice but to agree.

"So, what are you going to do now then?" Princess Peach asked. Peppermint Patty shrugged.

"Find a hotel or an apartment to stay until Chuck finds me. Shouldn't be too long I guess. Know anywhere where the rent is low?" Peppermint Patty asked.

"Yes, right here. You'll stay in the castle with us until your friend comes" Peach offered. Peppermint Patty made an excited exclamation.

"No way, really?! Thanks princess, you're awesome" Patty said eagerly. Princess Peach giggled.

"It's nothing. But, you said something about your friend needing to recruit an army of heroes, right?" Peach asked. Peppermint Patty nodded.

"Oh yeah, he's supposed to go around all of the worlds and recruit the best heroes about" Patty confirmed.

"Well then, it's fortunate you came to me. Our Kingdom happens to have two very great heroes, so when your friend Chuck gets here we'll have them here ready to help his cause" Princess Peach offered. Patty was ecstatic.

"You mean it?" Peppermint Patty asked. Peach nodded, and Patty sighed "Thank you. That'll be very helpful. To tell you the truth, Chuck's

not the best at assembling a winning team. But then again, I never would have thought he could become such a swell hero overnight, so who knows what he's capable of"

Some of the onlooking Toads were looking kinda uneasy over this suggestion, and Toadsworth knew just why.

"Princess, are you quite sure it's wise to send Mario and Luigi off on this mission. Because in all honesty, I have to admit, this kingdom is virtually defenceless without them" Toadsworth said cautiously.

"I understand that, but if what Patty says is true, and I'm sure it is based on the sincerity in her voice, then protecting the universe is of far greater importance than just guarding this castle. I'm sure they'll be able to pop in to defend us occasionally anyway, and if not, we can always ask Wario and Waluigi to fill in for them" Princess Peach said optimistically. Toad and Toadsworth gave her uncertain looks.

"Uh... princess, do you really think asking Wario and Waluigi for help is such a good idea?" Toad questioned awkwardly. Peach hummed to herself.

"Well... maybe not the best idea, but we'll think of something" Peach said, still pretty optimistic. She gestured to two Toads with yellow and blue spotted caps respectively to come over "Please set up one of the spare bedrooms for Peppermint Patty" She glanced over at Patty again "Fancy any supper?"

"Hmm, now that you mention it I am kinda hungry. Sure, I'll eat anything. As long as it's low carb and high in protein, gotta stay in shape for the next baseball season" Peppermint Patty said, getting into one of her regular exercising positions. The Toads all raised their eyebrows at this display and sniggered, while Peach just politely nodded and instructed the two Toads to inform the chef to bring something like Patty described. As the two Toads scurried off, happy to help.

"If there's anything else you need just let me us know" Toad said to Patty, who nodded.

"Thanks" Peppermint Patty said. She hummed for a moment before she decided to ask "So, what are these Mario and Luigi's guys like? Do they have any super powers like Chuck?"

"Well, apart from enhanced physical ability they don't have any inherent powers. They do have a lot of power ups though, tons of battle experience and creativity in combat. They've beaten all kinds of opponent, some with powers of a cosmic scale. I think they'll be very helpful to your friend" Peach informed Patty.

"Ok, sounds good" Peppermint Patty replied. She wondered how useful overall they could be against any enemy as powerful as Joe Agate, but she didn't voice this opinion. Instead she asked of another curiosity "So, if you've got heroes here, what kinda villains you got?"

"Well..."

BANG!

BOOM!

BANG AGAIN!

The whole room shook violently, The Toads all fell down and on top of each other, many of them dropping decorations or seats they were carrying and causing them to go sliding everywhere. Up near the throne Patty, Princess Peach, Toad and Toadsworth were all struggling to stay upright and grab onto something. The two Toads failed and landed on top of one another, Toadsworth letting out a loud cry of pain as Toad squashed his back. Patty and the princess managed to remain upright through it all by grabbing onto the ends of the throne, though when the shaking finally did stop they were still left feeling sick and worn out.

"What the heck was that?!" Peppermint Patty gasped.

"Most likely our local villain" Peach replied tiredly. The main doors into the throne room sprung open as a Toad wearing armour that clearly didn't fit him properly walked in.

"Princess, we're under attack!"

"Yeah, we kinda got that" Toad said painfully as he and Toadsworth struggled to their feet.

"Oh, right, sorry. But we're outnumbered and overpowered and there's no sign of the Mario brothers!" The Toad Knight shrieked.

"Quick, everyone-PANIC!" One of the fallen Toad's called out. Immediately the scattered Toad's all got to their feet and ran around in circles screaming at the top of their lungs. Peppermint Patty looked at this display of terror and gaped.

"What's everyone freaking out about, shouldn't they be barricading the doors or rushing to battle, or at least do something to protect you from attack?" An incredulous Patty questioned the princess.

"Yes, well, as lovable as they are Toad's aren't the most tactical people" Princess Peach replied. She turned serious and said "We need to get out of here, there's an escape tunnel set up in the next room, we just need to gather up every Toad we can and-"

There was a sudden explosion up ahead, followed by falling rubble as a giant hole opened up in the ceiling. A large figure swooped down from the hole and shook the earth as it landed. It was Bowser, wearing a bowtie and a red flower. The Koopa king let loose a monstrous roar that echoed all around the castle, terrifying the Toads to no end.

"-Too late"

Bowser grinned at Princess Peach as more of his minions climbed down into the room using ropes, and soon the throne room was as filled with koopas and goombas who went on to hold the Toads captive. Peppermint Patty looked Bowser over, sizing up the villain. After catching his eye and seeing him snarl at her Patty gulped.

"Now there's a villain for you" Peppermint Patty commented.

"Princess Peach! So good to see you again my dear" Bowser called over. Princess Peach remained surprisingly calm and graceful in the face of this invasion, as she always did.

"My, two attempts to kidnap me in just one day. That's rather rare for you Bowser, is this a special occasion? For you I mean, we've already had our special occasion" Peach said.

"Oh, it's pretty special. And this ain't a kidnapping princess" Bowser replied.

"It's not?" Toad asked, and everyone looked astonished by this revelation.

"Nope. You see, I've been doing some thinking" Bowser began pacing around the room, slowly making his way towards where the Princess and Patty stood "I know, weird to imagine me actually thinking something through, right? But I realise that none of my schemes ever work. No matter how hard I try or how creative I get, the whole kidnapping thing just never works quite the way I want it to. I suppose there are several reasons for this, not that I know any of them besides those irritating Mario brothers" He breathed fire at the mention of his arch-enemies "Lately I've been going over my horrendous track record, trying to think of SOMETHING I haven't tried yet, or a reason for my failures. Some sort of weakness or flaw I've overlooked. And you know what, I finally figured it out"

He stopped before Princess Peach, throwing her a look that urged him to ask what it was.

"What is it?" She asked.

"Time" Bowser replied "I always give them too much time. My plans are simple you see, I kidnap you and try to marry you, but for reasons I don't understand myself I never follow through with such before Mario and his annoying brother, what's his name, show up to take you back. Honestly, I always give them enough time to go running through eight different castles and environments, why do I do that? So this time, I've decided to speed things up"

The evil king gestured to the ropes his minions had slid down into the room on, where a koopa dressed up as a priest and carrying a bible was climbing down. Peach facefaulted.

"I'm going to hold the wedding right here and right now. I've sent Kamek and a bunch of my other minions to hold the Mario brothers up if they try to reach the castle, and I've set up an ambush at their home. More of my minions are guarding the castle to keep them away. With a little luck, and some haste, we should have plenty of time to pull off this wedding. Then, once we're married, I'll have the authority as King of the Mushroom Kingdom to order all your Toads to seize the Mario brothers and lock them up in the dungeon. And they won't fight their friends, so they won't be able to stop me this time. I'll finally be king of this kingdom, I'll have beaten the Mario brothers, and then I'll go on to conquer the rest of the world! Should be a synch being king of two kingdoms. And best of all, I'll

be able to gloat to the Mario brothers about how I totally beat them for the rest of their lives as they're rotting away in a jail cell!MWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

The koopas cheered and whooped loudly in response to their master's declaration, the Toads all shivered in terror. Princess Peach gulped nervously and Toad and Toadsworth exchanged worried glances. And Peppermint Patty said plainly "What if she doesn't want to marry you?"

The cheering stopped abruptly as everyone looked at Patty. Bowser gave her a blank look and waved her off "Did I say I was giving her a choice?"

"But you can't force her to marry you, that's wrong!" Peppermint Patty said stubbornly. She was probably the only person who would argue with a giant turtle monster that could incinerate her with one deep fiery breath. Bowser laughed hysterically.

"Girly, I'm a villain. What do I care about what's right and what's wrong?" Bowser asked, and all the koopas laughed with him.

"You should, because I know someone who's gonna kick your scaly ass if you do something wrong" Peppermint Patty warned. Bowser just waved her off again.

"Like I said, Mario will never make it here in time" Bowser said, giving Patty a long look over "So who are you then?"

Peppermint Patty was about to answer when Bowser continued anyway "Oh wait, you're probably princess Daisy aren't you? Good, you can be the brides maid in the ceremony" Peppermint Patty looked dumbfounded.

"I'm no princess. I'm Peppermint Patty" Patty insisted. Bowser laughed.

"Yeah right, nice try, _princess,_ but you can't fool me that easily. It's not like there are any other human women in this world besides Peach and her cousin, so who else could you be" Bowser said stubbornly.

"Actually, she's telling the-" Toad bravely stepped up to say, but was silenced by a wave of flames spat his way and Bowser's yell of "SILENCE"

"Why am I arguing over this, every second we wait is risking this whole plan. Everybody put up a few decorations and form two galleries, HURRY!" Bowser spat at his minions, who nodded fearfully and ran about in a hurry trying to make the throne room look fit for a wedding, even despite the big gaping hole in the roof and rubble everywhere. Princess Peach exchanged a nervous look with Toad and Toadsworth.

"So, think your Mario bros will be here in time?" Peppermint Patty asked, knowing full well there was nothing she and a bunch of cowardly mushroom people could do to put a stop to all these turtle monsters.

"Sure he will... I hope" Princess Peach sighed.

* * *

><p>Mario, Luigi and Charlie Brown lead the attack against the next blockade. A trio of giant goombas the size of elephants, probably grown to such a size by Kamek's magic Mario explained. Despite being a hundred times bigger than the normal goomba variety, their brains seemed more or less the same size, as they showed no better strategy in their attack other than charging about wildly. Made it easy to beat them, Charlie Brown just needed to erect an appropriately sized light barrier for them to crash into. Then while they were dizzy, Charlie Brown would throw Mario and Luigi up high in the sky to perform ground pounds on the right and left Goombas, with just enough force to squash them both, while Charlie Brown burned the middle one down with a barrage of white flames.<p>

"How many does this make?" Charlie Brown asked his new companions.

"I'd say this is the sixth group of enemies trying to impede our progress. Bowser must-a really want to keep us away this time" Mario answered back, wiping dust off his sleeves.

Currently the heroes were nearing the end of the road leading up to the castle, the gates already in sight. And the whole way here they had come under attack by enemies. Three varieties of Shy Guys, a dozen koopas riding these giant yellow caterpillars called wigglers, many swarms of goombas, and Bowser had even set up a trap involving a huge dragon the Mario brothers called Hooktail. Charlie Brown was amazed at how, despite only having marginally superhuman strength (About enough to lift two tons Luigi had boasted), and the fact they had supposedly been up since sunrise and it was now the dead of night, the Mario brothers did not appear worn out. Much. Ok, Luigi was starting to look tired, but Mario kept up his hero act with vigour.

"What's your secret" Charlie Brown had asked them after their defeat of Hooktail.

"About two and a half decades of doing the same thing, keeps you super fit" Mario replied.

"So what's their excuse for the pot bellies?" Snoopy had whispered to Woodstock.

Now with the giant goombas out of the way and no other enemies in clear sight, the heroes only had a short trek left before they reached the castle.

"So, how exactly do we get in there, since the doors look closed and I'm guessing they'd lock them. Should I fly us in?" Charlie Brown asked. He could have suggested blasting down the doors, but figured that would be inappropriate, since this was a good princesses castle.

"Nah, there's a pipe in one of the bushes that leads past the doors. Just keep us covered from the doomships, and any bullet bill cannons they might have set up along the walls" Mario explained.

"What are bullet bills?" Charlie Brown asked, thinking it an unusual

name.

"Giant bullets with eyes and angry mouths with sharp teeth, sometimes with arms on the sides" Luigi replied casually.

"Oh. Ok" Charlie Brown said. This world just kept getting crazier and crazier.

Mario's assumption turned out to be right, there were a dozen black cannons set up along the wall, and when the group got a bit too close to the castle these bullets popped out slightly, as though checking to see what was there, before being fired completely. These Bullet Bills didn't have arms, but they did seem to have sentience as they took their own course and followed after the heroes. They weren't too much of a nuisance though, they exploded on contact with Charlie Brown's shields.

"Sure-a speeds things up having you around Charlie, where have-a you been all these years we've been getting things thrown at us?" Luigi asked jokingly.

"Getting picked on for being a screw up" Charlie Brown thought to reply, but held his tongue 'cause it would probably sound awkward.

While Charlie Brown kept the group covered from the onslaught of Bullet Bills, Mario tore a path through several wandering goombas and led the group to a large orange pipe. Having already been told about how giant piped in this world often led to different places if you slid down them, Snoopy didn't think twice before jumping in. It took him a bit longer to jump out screaming, and the reason why became clear as a large venus flytrap like red plant with white spots peeked out of the pipe, and proceeded to spit a few fireballs in the heroes direction before sinking back into the pipe. Mario pulled a red and orange flower with black eyes out of his pocket, assuming the red and white colouring of his Fire Mario form. He walked closer to the pipe, waited for the piranha plant to rise up again and struck it in the face with a fireball. The hungry plant burned to a crisp straight away.

After having a look down the pipe to make sure there were no other nasty surprises waiting down there, the heroes hopped down. Mario slid down first, followed by Luigi, Woodstock and Snoopy. Charlie Brown waited a moment to ask Sparky "Why are there so many pipes around here anyway?"

"When you've been around the worlds as much as I have, you realise that some things just defy explanation or reason" Sparky answered vaguely. Charlie Brown stared at him for a moment then looked down the pipe. Holding his breath and hoping the inside of it was clean, Charlie Brown jumped in.

* * *

><p>(Throne Room)<p>

Following Bowser's rapid orders, the koopas, with the forced aid of some of the Toads, had converted the throne room into a relatively adequate presentation of a wedding chapel. The isles on the grooms side were filled with Koopas and Bowsers other minions, while the

majority of Toads were on the Brides side. Toadsworth and Toad were forced to serve as the Best man and ring bearer respectively, while Peppermint Patty, who's continued complaints that she was not Princess Daisy fell on death ears, was forced to dress up in an orange dress and be the brides maid. She had punched the two girl koopas who shoved her into it afterwards, but wasn't about to fight the whole koopa troupa army. The koopas had grabbed a young Toad girl from the corner of the room to be the flower girl. So far the wedding was going... well, see for yourselves.

"HURRY IT UP WILL YA!"

The koopa priest cowered before his angry king.

"B-b-but sire, w-we can't skip past the pledge, it's an important part of the-"

"I DON'T CARE! We don't have time for silly little trivialities that no one even cares about anyway, just skip to the "I do"'s already!" Bowser demanded. The priest looked mortified.

"Erm, well... I... I suppose we can s-sk-skip the pledge, but after that comes the vows" The priest said meekly.

"Pass" Bowser said with an annoyed wave. The priest looked miserably at the bible in his hands.

"Boy, talk about your mean groom" Peppermint Patty whispered to Toad, who nodded despite himself "Are you sure those Mario guys will be here in time?"

"They better be. I don't wanna bow to Bowser" Toad wined, but he whispered too loudly and gained the attention of several people standing by the alter, most worryingly Bowser.

"Be quiet, we've got a lot of important wedding traditions to skimp over here!" Bowser growled while shaking his fist at Toad, who shrunk back behind Patty. Peppermint Patty couldn't believe how all this was happening and no one was doing anything to stop it. She felt sorry for these poor Toads, everyone must be pushing them around if this is what they're like in the face of danger. Kinda like Chuck, expect they were usually a lot more cheerful than him.

"Lighting of the candles? I've never even heard of that crap!" Peppermint Patty tuned in to hear Bowser yell.

"The unity candle is another important aspect of the ceremony, preceeding the pronouncement and communion" The priest explained. Princess Peach, shockingly calm despite her unease with her predicament, was still polite enough to raise her hand and wait for permission before asking a question.

"Excuse me, but doesn't the lighting of the Unity Candle proceed after we exchange the rings?" Peach asked. The koopa priests eyes widened and he gasped, covering his mouth before letting out a horrified squawk.

"Oh no, you're right! Dear lord, what have I done!" The priest broke down in a state of panic, muttering things that sounded like "Disgraced the sacred act" or "God forgive me my foolishness". Bowser

rolled his eyes and pulled the priest back onto his feet.

"Forget it you chowder head, just skip to the next part" Bowser rudely demanded. Fighting back tears, the priest nodded and began reading some passages from his bible. Toadsworth sighed.

"Hardly a proper wedding is it. Though I suppose that's not what we want it to be" Toadsworth said drearily to Peppermint Patty. She noticed everyone in the isle looking up at once, and she saw a figure swoop in from the hole in the ceiling. A blue figure riding what appeared to be a broomstick. The figure stopped before Bowser, who recognised him as Kamek.

"Ah, hold the throne. Kamek, good to see you. What's the word?" Bowser asked, foolishly but happily expecting news of the Mario brothers capture or defeat. Kamek fiddled with his fingers and looked at the ground, refusing to meet his king's eye, which re-soured Bowser's mood.

"Well, my liege... they're here" Kamek said quickly. Bowser was silent for a moment. Then-

"WHAT!" The whole room shook from Bowser's furious roar, but even that was not as terrifying for everyone present as the look of pure, violent, undiluted rage on the koopa king's face. It took all the strength Kamek had in him not to wet his robes.

"I'm sorry sire, I-"

"HOW COULD YOU LET HIM GET HERE SO FAST! I MEAN, SERIOUSLY, WITH ALL THOSE AMBUSHES WE SET, INCLUDING THE ONE WITH YOU, HOW COULD HE GET TO THE CASTLE JUST LIKE THAT! You're bluffing, aren't you! TELL ME YOU'RE BLUFFING!" Bowser screamed, grabbing Kamek by the collar and shaking him around like a ragdoll. Even his beloved and respected caretaker was not safe when he was this angry. Though equally terrified at the situation, Peach, the Toads and Peppermint Patty all listened carefully to the very loud discussion.

"W-w-well, my lord... if it helps... they didn't get past my ambush on completely their own accord" Kamek whimpered. Bowser gave him a curious look.

"You know I don't speak fancy talk Kamek, what does accord mean?" Bowser asked, setting the magikoopa down roughly. Kamek straightened his glasses and took many deep breaths. If he were any other minions he would have been pounded by now. But luckily, Kamek was a little more important to Bowser than most minions.

"Later on I'm going to read a dictionary for you and expand your vocabulary" Kamek sighed. It shocked Peppermint Patty to see that he was actually able to make a joke in this situation. Or was it a joke? Either way, Bowser tapped his foot impatiently for a proper response, to which Kamek gave one "What I mean is they had help"

Bowser let out an impatient growl.

"Oh great, who have they teamed up with this time? Their evil clones? The Lumas? That nutty professor? Prince Peasley? Chippy?" Bowser listed many more names after that, none of which Peppermint Patty knew and some of which she was pretty sure did not exist in her

world. It was looking like he was going to continue on like this for a while before Kamek cut in.

"None of his past team ups, sire. This one is worse than any of them. Honestly though he didn't seem like much at first, but his power... I've never seen such a thing" Kamek shuddered, perking the interests of everyone in that room. The Toads were naturally frightened by any indication of a being of unfathomable power heading their way, but the thought that he might be on their side did fill them with confidence and eased their tension. Kamek's words also got Peppermint Patty thinking. Could it be? Yes, maybe, she just had to keep listening.

"Ok, when you say powerful, how bad are we talking here?" Bowser questioned, not liking where this was headed. Kamek struggled to put it into words.

"Well, I didn't experience it first hand because I caught him off guard with an extremely powerful stunning spell-a spell which would have almost immediately left even Mario and Luigi immobile for hours on end, but he just shrugged it off in a few short minutes. But before I was forced to flee by he and the Mario brothers, I sensed his power... and... oh sire, I just can't tell you how bad it would be if that bald kid in the yellow and black shirt were to unleash his full might upon us" Kamek broke off in a fit of hysterics, greatly worrying Bowser, who had quickly forgotten his anger over the magikoopa and was starting to feel nervous.

Peppermint Patty on the other hand was ecstatic.

"CHUCK!" She cheered, making all the guests in the isles jump, as well as giving Toad and Toadsworth a start. Bowser looked at her curiously.

"Chuck?" The koopa king inquired.

"Yes, that sounds like my pal Chuck. And let me tell ya, when he gets here, you-are-screwed! He'll flatten you and your evil buddies here in five seconds flat!" Peppermint Patty announced, bursting out in laughter as she did so. There was a short silence after that, the atmosphere in the room ranging from terrified and forlorn if you stood near the villains, and hopeful and relaxed if you stood with the Toads or Princess Peach.

Bowser, panting wildly, made a grab for the koopa priest's throat and shook him around.

"YOU HEAR THAT, PREACHY? We've got probably five minutes or less before the Mario Brothers and their dangerous new friend get here! I don't care how ashamed it makes you feel, skip to the "I do"'s and confirm this marriage right now, I am NOT failing twice in one day!" Bowser demanded. The Preach babbled incoherently.

"B-b-b-b-bu-bu-but, th-the-oh, FINE! God damn it all, alright!" The Priest finally squawked "Bowser, do you take-"

"Yes I do" Bowser said hastily.

"OK then. And Princess Peach, do you take-"

"Yes she does!" Bowser yelled, holding Peach back. The princess pushed his enormous hand away.

"Um, actually I don't" Peach pointed out.

"Well I say you do, tough luck princess" Bowser told her harshly. He didn't really mean to sound nasty, he honestly did have great affection for the princess, but this was not a good time to be lovey-dovey. He could always make up to her on the honeymoon.

"B-but the marriage can't be real if both participants don't-" The priest stopped short at the terrifying scowl Bowser gave him "Um, but let's just say she does"

Now was a good time to panic. For the Toads, that's exactly what they were doing. Toad, Toadsworth and Peach were all looking at the door, praying for Mario to just show up. Peppermint Patty looked around, realizing that the Toads weren't going to suddenly pluck up the courage to do something and that they were now out of options, she decided it was time for something drastic. Putting aside all sense of reason, as she normally did, Patty lunged forth, fists flying in an effort to punch out the priest before he could finish his speech. She might have succeeded in disrupting the wedding that way... if Kamek hadn't appeared behind her to hold her back by the shirt. And for an old man he sure did a good job of holding back the volatile tomboy.

Princess Peach grimaced and said her prayers, Bowser smiled triumphantly as the priest said "Then by the power bested in me, unfortunately, I know pron-"

The priest was silenced by a loud tapping sound and the appearance of a large black sphere rolling before the bride and groom and directly in front of the priest. Everyone looked at it, upon closer inspection it appeared to be a bomb. A _lit
_bomb.

...

...

"WAAAH!"

BOOM!

Everyone took cover as the bomb went off, Bowser shielded Peach from the blast while everyone else in the immediate vicinity managed to duck out of the way. Well, almost everyone, the priest was caught in the full brunt of the explosion and sent flying back into the wall, knocking him out cold.

The entire wedding reception broke out in a panic. The Toads all got up from their seats and began running around in circles, Bowser's minions all went on the attack-but in the confusion they just punched and shouldered and rammed into each other. The alter, really the area near the throne, was left completely charred from the blast and a large hole in the floor had opened up where the bomb had been.

Peppermint Patty, Toad, Toadsworth and Kamek all shook themselves off, their hearts pounding and themselves wondering what the heck just hit them. A bit further up Bowser turned around, releasing Peach and looking in the direction he thought the bomb had slid in from... and saw Wario and Waluigi standing there in an imposing manner, the latter juggling a bomb in one hand.

"Well, ain't that just-a nice. Having a wedding without-a inviting us. I'm-a so ashamed" Wario faked sadness, putting a hand to his forehead in the manner of a melodramatic actor. Waluigi shook his head and tutted.

"For shame" The purple wearing fiend pretended to sound offended. Bowser stared blankly at them briefly before growling.

"What the-you two! What the hell is your problem?!" Bowser demanded. Wario leaned against a pillar and rubbed the fingers on his other hand together nonchalantly.

"Oh, you know, we wuz just snooping around in the pantry, eating to our hearts content after we were so rudely thrown outta the party earlier, when we'sa saw you and your goons trying to make-a the princess marry you and, you know, we decided to get in your way" Wario replied calmly. Bowser huffed.

"Since when do you two care about doing anything heroic? Last I checked you were villains too!" Bowser said indignantly. Wario and Waluigi exchanged looks and shrugged innocently at Bowser.

"Actually, I think-a we're sorta anti-heroes, we're greedy, self centred, selfish and mean, but-a we do good things sometimes when it's-a convenient for us" Waluigi clarified.

"And how is it convenient for you now?! You think the Princess will give you a big pile of gold for your services, the most you'll likely get is a cake, that's all she ever gives. And you can't be that desperate for a little frosted treat" Bowser complained. Wario shrugged again.

"No, I suppose-a not" Wario admitted "-Buuuut, I seem to-a remember that you once took a big pile-a treasure from me and never gave it back"

Bowser squinted at the yellow and purple clad Mario knock-off, and when he realized what he was talking about he growled "Aw come on! You're _still _sore about that, that was when we were babies for crying out loud!"

"Hey, if there's anything I do better than stealing and making a mess-a things, it's-a holding a grudge" Wario said deviously. He nodded to Waluigi, who threw several more bombs into the audience of minions, who were still absent-mindedly beating each other up. The explosions did kinda get their attention though.

"Oh for the love of-Kamek, get up and help me out here. Hey you goombas, straighten up and make a run for the lanky one! Koopas, defense formation alpha!" Bowser barked out commands at his minions, desperately trying to regain order among his disordered troupes, but he was cut off as Wario ran at him and struck him in the gut with his

famous shoulder tackle, knocking the wind out of the koopa king before proceeding to dive on him and go wild. Waluigi laughed like a madman while pulling many more bombs out of his overalls and tossing them at the koopas, goombas, shy guys and other minions. And while all this was happening Princess Peach, Toad, Toadsworth and Peppermint Patty attempted to lead everyone out of the room to safety.

"Boy, I never thought I'd be happy to see _those guys_" Toad cheerfully told Peppermint Patty as they held open the door to the west wing of the castle. Patty just nodded, she still didn't know what the ##### was going on here, who Wario or Waluigi were, or anything else about this situation for that matter. Though, she supposed, if those weirdoes were on their side she owed them her gratitude. As she escorted, and often had to drag the Toads out of the room, one thought kept passing through her head.

"Chuck better hurry up and get here, 'cause I've had all the crazy I can handle for one day"

* * *

><p>Returning to the field, Yoshi was currently waddling around Sally, looking her up and down and making happy, cartoonish noises as she observed him. She was used to weird and unusual things back home, after Linus she was considered the weirdest person in school. It probably was largely due to the fact that she talked to the school building, but no one else seemed to realize it could talk back to her. She'd seen plenty of other strange stuff too, dancing bunnies, mail boxes that would spit letters back out, mostly when it was her brother trying to send a valentine, and she had once flown with Snoopy on his doghouse. And I mean actually flew, but they had to go back because the service on the flight was terrible. But a little green dinosaur? Yeah, that was a step too far even by her standards.<p>

Still, after getting over the surprise of seeing a creature that didn't exist on her world she had quickly come to like Yoshi. She liked cute things as much as any girl her age, and for a great big lizard creature Yoshi was pretty adorable. And his playful, giddy antics made her think of him as a happy little child. That just happened to be a dinosaur. Yeah, he was nice. At the very least his joyful mood kept her from feeling sad or grouchy over her predicament.

As Yoshi began skipping merrily through the flowers and jumping about, somehow hovering through the air for a moment before landing gently on the ground, then jumping up again for no other apparent reason than the fun of it. Sally paid close attention to his movements, and her gaze became a curious one as she noticed fully the saddle on Yoshi's back. What did that mean then? Was Yoshi some sort of mounting animal, like horses? Did people in this world ride dinosaurs instead of horses? That would be pretty cool, she thought. Another thought occurred to her, if Yoshi was wearing a saddle, then surely he must have belonged to someone. Someone friendly maybe, someone who could help her figure out where she was and how she could get back home? That last part was probably wishful thinking on her part, but Sally didn't like the thought of just being stuck on another world without having at least some clue of where she was and only a barely verbal green dinosaur for company.

"Hey Yoshi, come here boy" Sally called out like someone calling her dog. And like a dog, Yoshi came to a stop and ran up to her, obeying the command. Sally smiled at this, and though she didn't expect much of an answer she asked "Do you have an owner?"

Yoshi nodded and said his name. Best response she would get, Sally realized. At least he understood what she was saying.

"Do you know where they are?" Sally's follow up question. Again, Yoshi nodded "Can you take me to them?" Yoshi got suddenly excited, doing a sort of tap dance while nodding and making noises. Sally couldn't help but giggle at this.

"Alright then, lead the way" Sally insisted. Yoshi hopped up and began walking off, looking back and waving for Sally to follow him. And she did. The two walked through the vast green plains of unearthly fauna at a steady pace. They walked. And walked. And walked... and walked... and walked some more... and just kept walking for what felt like forever. It wasn't long before Sally's feet were starting to hurt and she was beginning to pant, just how big was this whole darn world!

"Are we there yet?" Sally finally nagged out.

"Yoshi" Yoshi replied, and Sally was convinced he was trying to say "Almost". Although, if that were true, then it would have been the fifth time he'd said it so far. Sally sighed. She wasn't built for walking long distances, she was built for lazing about on a beanbag all day. Any more of this trekking and her feet might pop right off her legs. There had to be a better way to travel than this.

Then suddenly it hit her, and Sally felt stupid that she hadn't thought of this sooner.

"Hey Yoshi, would you mind if I ride you the rest of the way?" Sally asked. Yoshi said his name giddily and ran forward, swerved around, ran behind Sally a few feet, swerved around again, then tossed Sally up into the air a few feet with his head so that she landed safely on the saddle. "Neat" She commented on Yoshi's precision.

"Yoshi" The little dinosaur squeaked appreciatively as he continued on his way, Sally holding onto his neck so she wouldn't fall off. At first she found herself very unsteady on top of Yoshi, but got over it in no time. And actually, when she stopped to think about it, she found this situation pretty empowering. She was riding a dinosaur! A small cute one maybe, but still a dinosaur. How many people in her class could say they'd done that? She couldn't wait to tell Eudora about this. And man, she_ really_ couldn't wait to brag about it to Lydia. She hated Lydia. And Tapioca Pudding, and Melody Melody, and every other girl who liked Linus except Janice, and maybe Mimi on a good day. But _especially_ Lydia.

Mulling over what had probably become of her rival and the other kids who had sided with Agate, and more importantly what had happened to her friends, Sally's thoughts drifted to her brother. Where was he? Surely he must have been looking for her. And she knew he could travel between worlds, why wasn't he here rescuing her? Was he even bothering to look for her?! Of course he was, she knew her brother wouldn't rest until he found her, unless something was holding him

back. That thought made her uneasy, had some other evil creep ambushed him? Was he alright? While Yoshi continued on course to the Mario brothers home, Sally couldn't stop wondering, _what's must he be doing?_

* * *

><p>"So, this is pretty normal for you guys, right?" Charlie Brown asked.<p>

"Yeah, pretty normal" Mario nodded. The group were now fighting what appeared to be a giant yellow octopus with a moustache wearing a crown, which had burst from the ground forming a huge pool around it in the entrance hall. The apparently royal octopus held Luigi, Snoopy and Woodstock high in it's tentacles, and was spitting fireballs and these big green fruits or something at Mario and Charlie Brown. According to Mario, the trick was to dodge the fireballs and send the green ones flying right back at him. Apparently all the worst enemies of the Mario brothers followed an attack pattern which could be exploited in order to defeat them. It left Charlie Brown to wonder why none of them ever thought _not_ to expose their weak points or shoot Mario with something he could use against them. Well, maybe he shouldn't complain, it did make things easier.

The crown wearing octopus spat several more fireballs in the heroes direction, most of which were dodged by Mario or blocked by one of Charlie Brown's light shields. Finally the kraken got tired of this and spat a green ball at them, which Mario jumped up and kicked back at the octopus. The octopus tried to flick it away with one of it's tentacles, but Charlie Brown flew in and struck at the ball a second time with a baseball bat made of light... and missed. Mario made up for this by quickly running to the wall the ball was heading towards, jumping against it, kicking off and then kicking the ball again. This time the octopus failed to strike the ball back and was hit right in the eye, causing it to drop it's captives in pain. With his friends free, Charlie Brown proceeded to bombard the octopus with light spheres, forcing the beast to sink away into the depths of it's pool. Luigi pulled a tapestry off the wall and threw it over the hole, covering it up.

"Well... that-a went well... apart from the moment where he almost-a ate me" Luigi said, shivering at the memory.

"Honestly, we're-a wasting time on all these fights, let's-a just ignore the next few bad guys if they're not threatening any Toads and-a hurry to the throne room" Mario instructed, and everyone nodded in agreement.

Abiding by their new strategy, the Mario brothers and Charlie Brown's group opened up the doors to the next hallway and ran down the halls, jumping or in Charlie Brown's case flying over the various enemies that obstructed their path, stopping only once to rescue a few of the Mushroom retainers that had fallen victim to some magikoopas. Though they didn't generally stop to fight they did occasionally strike at an enemy trying to hold them up, but kept up their momentum. Though they took a few hits from passing minions, the heroes managed to make it to the door leading to the throne room relatively unharmed, though the strain of fighting their way here was finally beginning to take it's toll on the heroes and they were all starting to get exhausted.

"Ok, if Bowser's already made off with the princess, can we please take a nap before setting off to get our strength up?" Luigi panted. Though Mario was reluctant to agree, he had to nod while he panted heavily, unable to speak for a moment. Charlie Brown, who was only not worn out due to his constant healing, which he wished he knew how to share with the Mario brothers, stepped up to the door and reached for the handle, only to have Mario grab him by the collar and pull him back. The reason why became evident as a giant block with an angry face crashed down where Charlie Brown had just stood and began to slowly rise again.

"Whomps, dangerous things. Gotta watch out for 'em" Mario said as Charlie Brown stared in amazement at the slowly rising stone. It held a calm expression for a moment, which changed once more to an angry face as it crashed down again. This time when it began to rise everyone ducked underneath and forced their way through the door before the whomp could attack again. The heroes sighed with relief and then got into fighting positions, ready to take on Bowser himself. They were caught off guard however by what they saw.

The throne room was in utter shambles, the back wall and a good chunk of the roof had been completely torn apart, there was debris all over the floor, koopa shells and unconscious minions everywhere, too many scorch marks to count, and at the centre of it all Wario was still wrestling with Bowser, punching the giant turtle repeatedly in the face as Bowser tried to strangle him and Waluigi pulled at the koopa king's flaming red hair. Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock stared at the scene in utter disbelief, and while Mario and Luigi were believably less shocked they were still rather disturbed by the damage.

"You fat Italian slob!" Bowser insulted Wario.

"You even fatter blob of ugly fat!" Wario shot back as he grabbed a nearby chain and began choking Bowser with it.

"Is this also pretty normal?" Charlie Brown asked Mario, who shrugged.

"Less normal, but still not too unusual" Mario replied simply. He looked up and noticed Princess Peach and Peppermint Patty pulling rubble off a young Toad girl, who was immediately escorted out of the room by Toad and Toadsworth as the girls tended to more trapped Toads. Mario smiled.

"We're-a here princess! Sorry we're-a late!" Mario called over. Peach stopped in her tracks and looked over at Mario, smiling when she saw him. Charlie Brown also looked over in their direction. When he noticed Peppermint Patty he did a double take. Not sure if she was real or if his eyes were playing tricks on him he rubbed his eyes and looked again. Still there. Could it really be-yes, it could. It was!

"PATTY!" Charlie Brown practically cheered in his excitement. Peppermint Patty perked up at the familiar voice and also looked over in his direction, looking delighted when she caught his eye.

"Chuck! Hey, it's about time you got here! Mind giving us a hand over here?!" Peppermint Patty called out while waving, happy to see him

again. Charlie Brown began to run over when he was suddenly knocked back into the wall as Wario went flying into him.

In the centre of the room Bowser stood up, Waluigi still holding onto him by the neck. Bowser reached behind and grabbed Waluigi, smashing him HARD into the ground and then kicking him away. He turned to Mario and scowled.

"Great, now you're here too" Bowser scoffed. Mario stood tall and heroic.

"It's over Bowser, go home and leave our kingdom alone or I'll give you your second beating today" Mario warned. Bowser's response was to snarl and spit a fireball upwards. Mario and co looked up to see the fireball smash into the ceiling above them, causing what little remained of it to collapse... Directly on top of them!

There was no time to move as the heroes were crushed under the rubble. Bowser laughed at this development, but contrary to popular belief he wasn't that stupid. He knew when he was beat and he had to flee, that dirty trick would just buy him time, he knew it. So with that he turned to Kamek and the few still conscious minions.

"Somebody grab the priest and let's get back to the Doomship. Come on, hurry!" Bowser commanded. Though only half conscious himself Kamek nodded and got up. He floated over to the Koopa priest and tapped his unconscious body with his wand, causing him to teleport back onto the Doomship. Kamek waved his wand at the rest of the minions in turn before disappearing himself. Now only Bowser remained of the invaders. He looked over to Peach and Peppermint Patty, who were flat on their back after only just barely dodging all that falling rock. While the girls were trying to get a grip on what just happened Bowser grabbed them and held them up in each hand.

"Come on princesses, time to scoot" Bowser said tiredly and somewhat dejectedly.

"For the last time I'm not a princess! And if you don't let go of me I'm gonna slug you into 1972!" Peppermint Patty threatened, though Bowser was not in any mood to pay her the slightest bit of attention and he carried the girls off towards the collapsed wall.

Over by the fresh pile of rubble, the rocks began to stir. They stirred a bit more before a light shown out and Charlie Brown emerged, pulling his team out with him. Luigi spun around dissily and steadied himself against Mario, who was hunched over and panting like he hadn't had a drink in thirty years. Snoopy and Woodstock were the last to emerge, looking somehow perfectly unharmed by the sudden impact. How'd they do that?

"Well, that was a dirty trick" Charlie Brown said, rubbing the rubble off of his head.

"Which is typical for him. I'm surprised I didn't expect that" Mario sighed. He stood up and scanned for Bowser, finding him standing by the edge of the room where the wall had given way with Peach and Patty slung over his shoulders, Patty wildly swinging punches at him to no avail. The winds suddenly picked up around the heroes, and they saw the Doomship descend. A white and green bowl like object with a

clown face floated down before Bowser, out from which Kamek's head popped up. Bowser tossed the princess and Peppermint patty inside before hopping in himself, turning back to Mario and friends and waving.

"So long, losers!" Bowser called as the clown car floated upwards. Mario and Luigi gasped and ran forth, but were forced to stay back as Bowser spat a stream of fire at them, and the clown car sped off onto the Doomship. In a moment of panic Charlie Brown flew up and rocketed after the escaping villain, and more specifically Patty, but ended up crashing face first into an invisible barrier. Recoiling from that bump, Charlie Brown looked up to see the Doomship preparing to take off, Bowser having just boarded. Kamek looked down at him from the side of the flying ship, pointing his wand down to maintain the barrier. He grinned smugly and waved casually at the Guardian.

Getting distressed, Charlie Brown began thoughtlessly pounding at the barrier, not even covering his fists with light initially. The barrier started to crack and give way, but the Doomship had already risen high up in the air and was preparing to take off. In a last ditch effort Charlie Brown flew back and covered himself in a light aura, then flew at the barrier with his hands outstretched, the aura around him reshaping to make Charlie Brown look like a giant glowing arrow. Said light arrow crashed straight through the barrier, the aura faded afterwards and Charlie Brown flew faster, almost reaching the ship... when he hit another barrier.

The doomship finally set sail and took off into the horizon. Charlie Brown, more stressed out than ever continued to pound away at the second barrier, though as the ship flew further away his stance became more saddened and his punches more half hearted. When the Doomship finally disappeared over the valley Charlie Brown floated down to the ground and onto his knees, officially depressed. Snoopy and Woodstock appeared by his side shortly afterwards, Snoopy pushing his head under Charlie Brown's shoulder and rubbing his chest in a comforting sort of way, as Mario and Luigi walked over.

"There, there, it's-a going to be alright" Mario said while patting the disheartened Charlie Brown's shoulder. Charlie Brown was silent for a moment before giving an unpleasant "Ha"

"Alright? How's it going to be alright? Your princess and Peppermint Patty, who I'd only just found, have just been abducted by a monster and his evil minions, and we completely failed to stop them. How is that alright?!" Charlie Brown asked, distressed. Mario gave him a sympathetic look and answered:

"Because we're-a gonna get them back"

"How?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Just-a go after them and take the princess and your girlfriend back, that's-a how. We do it all the time, it's no big deal" Mario replied nonchalantly. Charlie Brown blushed, he had fallen death to the whole second sentence at the mention of the g-word.

"She's not my girlfriend!" Charlie Brown squeaked, his face beet red with embarrassment. Mario and Luigi exchanged looks and the elder brother chuckled.

"Oops, sorry. Guess I have a habit of just-a jumping to conclusions. But seriously, we will get them back. You don't-a have to be so nervous, we-a rescue the princess from Bowser every other day of our lives. It's relatively easy. Things will work out fine" Mario explained confidently. After taking a moment to work past the blushing, Charlie Brown calmed down a bit, though he still wasn't entirely convinced.

"Ok then, I hope you're right" Charlie Brown sighed.

"He is" Sparky suddenly reappeared, who the heroes only just now realized was absent since they had entered the castle.

"Hey, where've you-a been this-a whole time?" Luigi asked.

"I've been here the whole time, I just made myself invisible" Sparky replied, giving Luigi an "Aaah" moment. The green clad plumber was about to ask why Sparky had been invisible, but the spirit dog floated down to his apprentice and began giving him more encouragement "You can trust Mario, Charlie. He's been a hero for many years now, he knows exactly what he's doing. Bowser may have gotten away, but he and his army are weakened. He won't bring any harm to Patty, just be patient. At least now we know she's safe, and we know exactly where we'll find her. Why, perhaps we'll even run into Sally along the way"

That thought did cheer Charlie Brown up a bit. Yeah, it did feel good to know Peppermint Patty was safe, conditions aside. It was a lot easier to just go after Bowser for her than trying to master that tracking ability that still alluded him. And Mario and Luigi certainly knew plenty about this world and who they were facing, confronting the koopas at their base would probably be easy. Yeah, easy. Maybe this wasn't so bad after all.

Toad and Toadsworth suddenly came back into the ruins of the room, noticing the destruction they both turned to the Mario brothers and Toad asked "He did it again?"

"Yeah, again" Mario nodded solemnly. Toadsworth began to break down and panic at the loss of the princess, whereas Toad looked worried but appeared already reassured that things would work out fine.

"Need anything power ups for your next journey then?" Toad asked while patting the sobbing Toadsworth's back.

"Well, if there are any extra super leafs or stars we'll take them, and maybe a few of those healing mushrooms. And a cuppa coffee for me and Luigi, we'll-a need it if we're setting off at-a this late hour" Mario nodded. Toad began to waddle off to fetch what Mario had asked, stopping by Charlie Brown to dust him off with a feather duster he extracted from under his cap and asked him "You want anything kid?"

"Um... no, I'm good" Charlie Brown replied, not sure what to ask of the Mushroom person. Toad gave him a friendly smile.

"Okey-dokey, if you need anything else though just ask" Toad said as he wandered off.

Charlie Brown looked after him and wondered aloud "How can he be so cheerful when the castle he probably lives in has just been attacked by monsters?"

"Like the answer to-a so many of your questions, it's just a matter of-a being used to it. Trust me, everything about our world that seems-a weird to you is pretty routine for all of us" Luigi answered immediately. He looked over to his purple wearing counterpart lying face down in the centre of the throne room and went over to help him up. At the same time Mario walked up to Wario and helped steady him to his feet. The yellow shirt, purple overall-ed counterpart huffed and puffed while regaining his focus.

"Man, that dirty koopa sure-a packs a wallop. I don't-a know how you can take his abuse all-a the time" Wario commented as Mario held him up by the shoulder.

"The secret is to just not let him hit-a you. And thanks for-a helping out there" Mario said gratefully. Wario huffed smugly.

"Well you'sa better be thankful, if-a not for us that scaly freak would-a married the princess and put-a you on display in a zoo or whatever. We saved-a the whole freaking kingdom" Wario boasted. Mario rolled his eyes at his cousins pompous attitude, but managed to smile through it anyway.

"So, you and Waluigi gonna help us go confront Bowser again at his castle?" Mario asked. Wario laughed sarcastically.

"Yeah right! No! We're-a done our good deed for the millennium, why should-a we break our backs fighting more of those annoying turtles" Wario said, suddenly regaining his strength and walking off towards his taller comrade. Mario sighed.

"I thought as much" Mario admitted.

Wario grabbed the still heavily battered Waluigi by the elbow and unceremoniously dragged him off into what remained of the hallway.

"We're done playing hero for the day, if you need us for-a anything else, we'll-a just be going back to emptying the pantry" Wario said as he departed with his semi-conscious brother.

Mario and Luigi waved him off, as Mario leaned in close to a slightly recovered Toadsworth and whispered "Make sure they don't"

Charlie Brown stood at the edge of the room where the wall leading out of the castle had given way, staring off into the distance where Bowser's Doomship and the rest of the armada had vanished into the distance. Snoopy and Woodstock stood at either side of him, also looking in that direction. Charlie Brown resisted the urge to moan. So close, he had been so close to being reunited with one of his friends. Peppermint Patty was right there, just a short pace in front of him, and now she was gone again. Charlie Brown felt his fist tighten. He made a silent vow to himself not to let this happen again. he didn't care if he had to face the entire koopa army, he would do it five times if he had to. He would get Patty back, Ancients swear he would get them all back.

Toad returned to the room carrying a brown sack and a tray with two cups of coffee on it. He handed the bag to Mario and allowed each of the brothers to pick their preferred drink. The bags underneath Luigi's eyes and the faint signs of darkness under Mario's eyes began to fade away as they drank, and they finished the beverages with relaxed sighs.

"That-a sure hits the spot" Mario complimented as he placed the cup back on the tray.

"It sure does. I think I might-a even be able to stay awake for more than five more minutes now. But still, I REALLY wish I could have just had my good nights sleep" Luigi said wistfully.

"Evil never sleeps Luigi, so we shouldn't either" Mario replied confidently.

"That's not healthy" Luigi pointed out. Mario thought about it and shrugged.

"Maybe not, but it's-a what we do" Mario said cheerfully. He looked back to Charlie Brown and walked over to him "So, Charlie, you up for a little adventure?"

Charlie Brown turned to him with a look of almost uncharacteristic determination and nodded "Yeah, let's do it"

"Alright then. Just-a one more thing before we go" Mario said, pulling out a whistle shaped like Yoshi's head "I hate-a to keep the little guy up, but we could really use Yoshi's help for this. So..." Mario brought the nose of the whistle to his mouth and blew. Charlie Brown stared curiously at him, he himself heard nothing at all, though Snoopy and Woodstock were suddenly on their knees clutching their ears.

* * *

><p>Yoshi, with Sally still on his back, was now finally nearing the home of the Mario brothers. Sally took a long look at the Mushroom styled house.<p>

"Mushroom houses huh? This must be the world where the smurfs live" Sally said, suddenly filled with childish mirth. She was a big fan of the Smurfs cartoon growing up, though perhaps not so much the movies. She looked back down at Yoshi, and wondered "But the Smurfs never rode around on dinosaurs. And dad said they're just fictional characters..." Sally sighed. So much for living childhood fantasies.

But then again she couldn't feel too disappointed. Smurfs or not, surely the people who lived in that mushroom house could be of help to her. They probably couldn't tell her how to get back home or anything, she doubted anyone who lived in a mushroom had the power to travel between worlds. But it would be nice to at least know where she was. And hey, maybe they would invite her in for dinner. She hadn't realized it until now, but Sally was starving.

"My stomach and I owe you a lot Yoshi, thank you. You're sure a lot more useful than my brother's pet beagle" Sally said kindly.

"Yosh, Yoshi" Said Yoshi, who really liked receiving compliments. He continued at a steady pace, but then when he was only five paces away from the house he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, unflinching. Sally took notice of this and stared at the back of the dinosaur's head in concern.

"Huh? Hey Yoshi, everything alright?" Sally asked. Yoshi did not respond. Confused, Sally leaned forward and gently tapped the back of the dino's head "Um, Yoshi?"

Sally scratched her head at Yoshi's odd behaviour. What she didn't know was that the dinosaur was listening, having just heard a high frequency sound that Sally's human ears could not register. Yoshi heard it again, and suddenly perked up. Sally was relieved to see Yoshi make some movement, but she wasn't prepared for when he suddenly bounded forward at great speed, soon reaching what must have been over a hundred miles per hour. Sally grabbed onto the back of Yoshi's neck, struggling to hold on one handed for dear life.

"Whaaaaa, whoa boy, slow down! Stop-stop!"

* * *

><p>Back in the throne room, Charlie Brown stared at Mario in confusion.<p>

"So, um... what are we waiting for?" Charlie Brown asked, noticing Snoopy and Woodstock still covering their ears and looking pained.

"You'll see in about..." Mario stretched out his hand, counting down the seconds with his fingers "Five. Four. Three. Two. One"

At the precise moment that Mario lowered his last finger a green blur shot into the room, almost toppling Charlie Brown over and onto Woodstock, before the blur settled in front of Mario, quickly revealing itself as Yoshi, who began licking Mario with his extremely long tongue. Mario could only laugh.

"Yes, it's-a good to see you too Yoshi" Mario said, patting the dinosaur's head. He noticed a shape behind Yoshi and turned to see Sally on his back, looking haggard and bewildered from her unplanned joy ride, her hair frizzled beyond belief and her clothes a mess. Right now she was panting heavily, apparently trying with all her might to neither faint nor vomit.

"*Gasp, pant, pant*... Okay... next... time... *Pant, cough cough cough*... If you're *Splutter*... going... to do that *Gasp, pant*... warn me first" Sally just barely managed to puff out, struggling to regain just some sense of composure. Charlie Brown, who she hadn't noticed because Yoshi stood with his back to him, stared at his sister with great uncertainty. After a long moment of silence, his mind finally clicked and he let out a mirthful yelp.

"SALLY!"

The sound of Charlie Brown's voice seemed to breath new life into Sally. Her tired and weary expression vanished in an instant and she

stopped spluttering. She turned around, looking Charlie Brown right in the eye, but saying nothing for a time, apparently not knowing whether she could believe what she was seeing. She soon got over it.

"BIG BROTHER!" Sally squealed with equal joy. Charlie Brown ran forth to hug her, but was himself pinned to the ground as Sally leapt off Yoshi to hug him aswell. And hug him she did, with every last ounce of strength in her body. Brimming with joy, Charlie Brown could form no words to speak to her sister, instead all he could do was laugh and hug her back harder, as she laughed aswell and rested her head against his shoulder. Mario and Luigi weren't quite sure what was going on at first, but after catching on they both "Aww"'ed at the cuteness of it, while Snoopy and Woodstock both danced happily and waited their turn to give Sally a hug. Sparky just stared with wonder and gave a relieved sigh that Sally was alright.

It was a good few minutes before the laughing siblings finally loosened their grips enough to sit up, both delighted to have each other back.

"Oh thank Ancients you're alright. For a while I was starting to worry I would never see you again" Charlie Brown said, a thousand knots loosening in his stomach.

"I was worried I'd never be found. But then Yoshi showed up. I was going to slug him just now, but man was he smart to get me here" Sally replied, giving her brother another hug. Mario patted Yoshi again on the head.

"Atta boy Yoshi, rescuing little lost girls all by yourself. You deserve a treat for that" Mario said. Yoshi's eyes widened and he began hopping on the spot, making pleading dog-like noises. Mario reached into his overall pocket and pulling out what might have been a type of plum. He tossed it up into the air, and Yoshi shot his tongue out to grab it in mid-air and pull it into his mouth, savouring the sweet taste of it.

It was a whole ten minutes before Sally was finally convinced to stop hugging her brother so they could get up off the floor, but even then she stuck close to him, cuddling Snoopy and Woodstock and asking her brother lots of questions.

"Where've you been? Are you alright? Are we really on another world? How did we get here, was it Joe Agate? Is he anywhere around here so I can slug him? Where's my sweet baboo? And Peppermint Patty and Lucy and everyone else? What world is this? How long do you think we'll have off school after you and Agate tore it down?"

Charlie Brown's head was starting to spin at the rapid pace of her questioning, so politely held his hand up to try and silence his sister.

"Well, um, I didn't get all of that, but I'll answer what I heard. We're on the Mushroom World in the Mushroom Kingdom, I've been fighting turtle monsters and other weird things with this worlds heroes-they're over there-Everyone else has been scattered around other worlds thanks to Joe, and, I think they'll probably send everyone to another school while ours is being repaired, so you probably won't have too long off" Charlie Brown replied.

"Wow" Sally sighed. Her face suddenly fell into a curious frown
"Turtle monsters?"

"Koopas. Not as ridiculous as they sound, though not-a exactly threatening either" Mario told her. Sally looked at him curiously, and again at Luigi. Mario was somewhat put off by the weird look she gave them "Something wrong?"

"Huh? Oh, nothing, sorry. It's just I wasn't really expecting this world to have people living on it considering how weird it looks. No offense, but I guess I was hoping for something a little more... you know, alien" Sally replied. That was when she noticed Toad and Toadsworth standing by the side of her smiling innocently. She looked at them for a moment before looking back at Mario, who responded by waving his hand and giving her a look that probably said, _that alien enough for you?_ Sally nodded and gave him a look that she thought meant _yeah, just about_.

"Well, anyway, it's nice to meet you, I'm Sally" Sally properly introduced herself, shaking hands with Mario.

"Mario. Nice to meet you little lady. And this is-a my little twin brother, Luigi" Mario said, behind him Luigi took off his hat and bowed.

"Charmed" Luigi said in a more dignified voice than anyone had ever heard him say. An effort to look refined, probably because he wanted to pass himself off as anything but a coward. So it was unfortunate for him that one of Waluigi's discarded bombs hidden under the rubble picked that moment to explode for no reason. Luigi screamed and leapt right over where the roof had been, eventually landing in Charlie Brown's arms. Charlie Brown stumbled backwards, struggling to keep on his feet under Luigi's weight. Eventually he couldn't take it and collapsed on his back. Sally and Mario rolled their eyes.

"Brothers. You love them to no end, but they're so embarrassing, right?" Sally asked. Mario nodded coyly.

"Totally" The plumber agreed. The two exchanged a giggle before helping their respective kin get up. Luigi shook himself off and attempted to pick up his dignity.

"Well, it's nice-a to see we've reunited two loving siblings, but I'm afraid we've-a got business to do. Charlie Brown, if-a you'd like you can-a stay here and catch up with-a your sister, but we're just going to be leaving to rescue the princess and-a your friend Peppermint Patty. You can catch up with us later" Mario explained.

"Rescue?" Sally turned to her brother, who suddenly looked downhearted again.

"Oh yeah, Patty kinda got kidnapped by the Mario brothers enemy just now" Charlie Brown replied meekly. Sally's expression changed in the blink of an eye from uncertain to bewildered.

"Well then what are we all standing around here for! Let's go get her back!" Sally exclaimed, marching off proudly to the rescue... the other way from where Bowser had fled.

Charlie Brown and Snoopy ran up to Sally and pulled her back.

"Um, Sally, first off you're going the wrong way... although I suppose that's the right way for you since there's a big drop going out through the hole. Second, you're not going anywhere" Charlie Brown explained. Sally gave an exaggeratedly angry yell.

"What!?"

"I'm sorry Sally, but until I'm sure it's safe you're staying right here" Charlie Brown said with all the brotherly authority he could muster. Sally wasn't happy.

"What do you mean, I wanna help" Sally said insistently.

"Well I'm glad to hear it, but I can't let you go with us. Mario, Luigi and I are about to embark on a dangerous mission to rescue Peppermint Patty and the princess, you'd just be putting yourself in danger coming along" Charlie Brown told her reasonably. Sally however was not such a reasonable person.

"No I wouldn't. What, you think just 'cause I'm a girl I can't take care of myself?! I never took you for so sexist!" Sally yelled indignantly, confounding her brother.

"Huh? I'm not being sexist, I'm being realistic. You don't have any powers or anything that can defend you from our enemies if we were ambushed" Charlie Brown replied.

"Oh no?" Sally put two fingers to her mouth and whistled. As if he'd been trained to do it, Yoshi ran behind Sally and flipped her up onto his saddle. She folded her arms and looked down impressively at Charlie Brown, who just took one look at Yoshi's cutesy face and sighed.

"Sally, I hardly see how-"

Luigi cut in "Actually, Yoshi's-a more than capable of looking after anyone. The little guy can swallow enemies twice his size, and he's-a been looking out for us since-a we were babies. She's-a actually being quite reasonable" Charlie Brown sighed, not liking where this was going.

"She's eleven years old" Charlie Brown protested.

"Twelve in two months. And what does age matter anyway" Sally said.

"A lot. Look Sally, I love you, and I have a responsibility as your big brother to look after you. I've already seen you get kidnapped once today, and I just failed to stop Peppermint Patty getting abducted a second time. I just don't want anything bad to happen to you" Charlie Brown explained sincerely. Sally gave him a sympathetic look, but still remained confident in herself.

"I understand that, big brother. But you don't have to worry about me, I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself. Besides, I've got Yoshi, what's the worst a couple of turtle monsters can do to me when I'm riding a dinosaur" Sally said boastfully. Yoshi made a cartoony

laugh.

Mario walked up to Charlie Brown and patted him on the shoulder "Kid, you might as well just give in. Trust me, when a woman makes up her mind on something, there's-a no way of stopping her" He said in a tone that brokered no argument. Charlie Brown sighed heavily, but knew from experience that he was right.

"Ok Sally, you can tag along" Charlie Brown said in a resigned voice. Sally cheered victoriously as Yoshi began playfully hopping on the spot and clapping his hands. Charlie Brown added "But you're not to get involved in any scuffles unless you have to, and you stay close to the group, no wandering off. And you have to be riding Yoshi most of the way. Oh, and at the first sign that things get too dangerous, I want you to go back to the Light Palace. Is that clear?"

"Yeah, sure, whatever" Sally said giddily, and Charlie Brown knew she had only been half listening. Charlie Brown sighed, deciding the sooner things got bad enough to send her back, the better.

Sparky floated down between the heroes, he had stayed out of the previous discussion to let Charlie Brown have a go at decision making, but decided now was a good time to add his voice in.

"Well, if you're all sure about this course of action then maybe we should all take half an hour to rest. I feel you two still need some catching up to do" Sparky said specifically to Charlie Brown and Sally. He then turned to Mario and Luigi "And I'm sure you two should take a nap, it doesn't help if you get too tired"

"Sounds like a plan" Luigi said, suddenly falling to the ground and going to sleep right away. The other heroes watched uncertainly as the younger brother began to snore, but soon they burst out giggling.

"I trust you two to get him to a bed" Sparky spoke to Toad and Toadsworth, who both nodded.

"You bet you can" Toad said, the two of them quickly hoisting Luigi up and carrying him off. In Toad's eagerness he didn't watch where he was going and bumed into the wall on the way out the door and ended up dropping Luigi's head on the floor, earning a pained scream from the green and blue hero. Toad frantically apologised before he and Toadsworth lifted Luigi up again to carry him out.

"Ok then, now... um, Charlie Brown, where did Snoopy and Woodstock go?" Sparky asked. Charlie Brown, Sally and Mario looked around the ruined room, but saw no sign of either animal. Suddenly the ground began to rumble, and a hole opened up in the ground. The group watched as what looked like a mushroom shaped rocket rose out of the hole and prepared for take off, Snoopy and Woodstock visible through the window. Charlie Brown stared bewildered as the rocket took off, flying high into the sky. It was a moment before either of them registered just what was going on, and then they panicked.

"Oh good gried!" Charlie Brown exclaimed, lighting up his feet and flying off after the mischievous pair. The rest of the group just stood back and continued to stare off in amazement.

"I can see I've signed Luigi and myself up for one wild ride by

agreeing to help you guys" Mario said blankly. Sparky sighed and nodded.

"That's putting it mildly"

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, in the Captain's quarters of Bowser's Doomship, a room decorated with fine furnishings and black banners with the red symbol resembling Bowser's face draped over the walls, the silent koopa king sat in a throne at the end of the room. There was only one window in this room and only one lit candle, so much of the room was hidden in shadows. What could be seen with the little light provided was Bowser himself sitting miserably with his head leaning on his fist, a large cage in which Princess Peach and Peppermint Patty had been locked hanging next to his throne, and the frightened group of koopas standing before their king. Among them, only Kamek had the courage to step forward to address Bowser.<p>

"So how's the priest?" Bowser asked, sounding like he really didn't care about anything at the moment. Kamek knew he did though, and that's why he shivered before making his reply.

"I'm afraid he sustained serious head injuries from that explosion, sire. Even with aid from my healing magic, I'd say he'll be out cold for at least a week" Kamek explained. Bowser heaved a long, heavy sigh.

"And figures he'd be the only priest in all of dark land. Figures that's what I get for living in such a rough neighbourhood" Bowser muttered. For a moment he appeared downhearted. Then for another moment he appeared ticked off. Then the next moment he became enraged and let out a furious roar before smashing a nightstand next to his seat.

"IT'S NOT FAIR! All I asked for was one little victory. Just-One! I even prayed to God that he'd let me beat those annoying heroes for just once, but nooooo. Because God doesn't seem to like me enough to let me succeed at anything!" Bowser spat, getting up and marching around the room in a fit, the koopas all backing into the corner in terror.

Bowser paced around, stomping the wooden floors as he went, complaining over and over about his misfortune "It was probably the best plan I'd had in years! All those booby traps I set up surely should have kept the Mario brothers away, that wedding should have gone down. But then those two loser Mario brother knock-offs had to just in and ruin everything! Sheesh, what is it with every guy in overalls giving me a hard time! Someone remind me to flatten those guys later! And that stupid kid with Mario-he doesn't look tough, but if he's anything like Kamek said... grr!"

In his blind rage Bowser ended up unknowingly punching a statue of himself into oblivion, sending chunks of rock flying across the room. He spent the next few minutes marching around grouchy before coming to a stop in the middle of the room by the table, which he placed his hand upon while trying to calm down a little.

"I probably could have won. I probably, actually could have won. But not now. A week will give Mario and his pals plenty of time to reach

my castle, and then I'll no doubt lose to that dumb plumber again no matter how hard I try to clobber him. 'Cause that's how it always works, I try my very best to do good at something only to get my ass handed to me by a freaking plumber. A plumber for crying out loud! What kind of self respective king loses to a guy who unclogs drains! GRRRRRRRAAAARRRGGH!" Bowser's roars sent shockwaves around the room, rattling the cage the girls were in and sending several ornaments flying off the walls, coupling with the broken rocks to make the room look like a total mess. Not that Bowser cared right now.

Bowser panted furiously, his fists shaking in bottled up fury... but then all of a sudden the anger vanished from his eyes, and he stared at the ground in misery.

"There's just no way I can win is there?" He asked, sounding almost on the verge of tears "Nothing I do will ever be good enough, will it? I've spent my entire life trying to be a great conqueror, but I have nothing to show for it. I've accomplished nothing, my own wife's long left me, and my kingdom is a wasteland. Some king I am, I can't even lead my army to one single victory against just one fat little man. I'm pathetic"

The koopas all looked to their king with pity in their eyes as Bowser leaned against the table and stared sadly into space, silent except for the occasional resigned sigh. Even Princess Peach felt sorry for him, though Peppermint Patty paid almost no mind. She was preoccupied trying to break out of the cage.

"Come on, open" Patty grumbled as she tried shoulder tackling the door, the rattling the locks. Getting frustrated with the lack of progress she punched the bars, which earned her nothing but a few sore fingers. Princess Peach looked down at her and placed a comforting hand to her shoulder.

"It's not going to work Patty dear. I've tried breaking out of these cages before, unless you have a super star on hand nothing will work. Just stay calm and don't strain yourself" Peach advised. Peppermint Patty looked at her incredulously.

"Are you kidding princess, we've been abducted by monsters! We can't just sit around not doing anything, we've got to break free!" Patty insisted, but the princess shook her head.

"I've tried that many times before. Trust me, it's better to just wait for Mario and your friend to catch up to us. That's all we can do" Princess Peach told her. Peppermint Patty folded her arms.

"Well that might be fine for you princess, but I'm Peppermint Patty. And I am not accustomed to waiting around and letting the men do my rescuing for me" Peppermint Patty told her. Peach didn't continue further. She admired Patty's spirit, but she had to learn a thing or two about patience. She turned back to Bowser, who was currently fiddling with a gold coin on the table.

"Sire" Kamek began in a kind voice, stepping out of the corner. Bowser couldn't look at him, too wrapped up in his own thoughts. After a moment of thinking he dropped the coin he was holding and sighed again.

"Maybe I should just give up. Sign a peace treaty or something and

spend my life trying to actually make something of my own kingdom instead. Even though Darkland has little to no valuable resources and the crummiest soil in the world. It's not like things are ever going to change with my current agenda. I'm locked in a loop fighting Mario, no matter how many variations of my plans I try out, it all ends the same. It's the status quo. I should just accept that I'm a failure and move on with my life" Bowser suggested, leaning against the side of the table. His expression gradually changed from defeated to enraged once more.

"But then everything I've done would be for nothing! I can't quit, because I'd just be PROVING that I'm a loser! I'd walk around the rest of my life with everybody laughing behind my back, saying "There goes the kind who never accomplished anything". And I REFUSE to live like that! I refuse to let Mario have the last laugh! I can never live in peace knowing that chubby jerk from Brooklyn has the last laugh!" Finally losing it, Bowser shot to his feet, shook his fist and yelled to the sky "ISN'T THERE ANY WAY TO BEAT THOSE PLUMBERS?"

"There is..." A mysterious voice spoke, causing everyone in the room to jump and look around. A figure stepped out from the darkest shadows in the room. A boy of thirteen wearing an orange shirt, brown pants and a green cap. He gave the curious Bowser a sinister smile.

"-It's called siding with us"

"Agate!" Peppermint Patty yelled out, thrashing against the door to her cage and struggling to get out and pound the evil boy. Joe Agate just gave her a coy look and chuckled.

"Why hello Patricia, I see you're finally living the dream of being a go-go girl" Joe quipped, earning him further ire from Patty.

"I'll go-go you, you deranged son of a-" Princess Peach quickly covered Patty's mouth to muffle her threats, while Joe just laughed some more and turned back to the annoyed koopa king.

"What do you want kid, can't you see I'm throwing a hissy fit in here?" Bowser growled, not even bothering to wonder how a human boy got into his quarters. Joe laughed and paced around.

"I'm here to offer you a job" Joe answered. Bowser scoffed.

"For your information I'm a king, we monarchs do not work for snott nosed kids" Bowser spat back.

"Oh, but I think you'll find I'm offering you quite the business opportunity here" Joe said calmly "Good hours, loads of benefits, daycare for your kids... Mario's head on a plate"

Bowser raised a brow, that last suggestion earning his interest like Joe knew it would. Joe looked at Bowser and waited for him to reply. Bowser hesitated for a minute, thinking it through. With a stern look he told Joe "Go on" Agate's wicked smile widened.

My name is Joe Agate. I represent my master the Dark Witch, the Guardian of Darkness, and her Dark Empire. I am here to recruit you and your army to our empire, so that we may work together to conquer

the universe" Joe explained. Bowser exchanged uncertain looks with Kamek.

"Conquer the universe?" Bowser questioned.

"You heard right. You see, the boy you saw with Mario earlier was my nemesis, Charlie Brown, the Guardian of Light. The Witch controls the half of the universe shrouded in darkness, your world is just one in many which resides in the Realm of Light, which is the half of the universe watched over by Charlie Brown now that the Witch killed the old Guardian Sparky. My master plans to build up her army with... what would be the proper term... eh, let's just say villains, for convenience sake. Villains from the Realm of Light to supplement her heartless armies and take over the worlds, thus shrouding everything in darkness" Joe Agate recounted. Bowser scratched his chin, sounding interested in Joe's story.

"And what would I get joining you weirdoes, I ain't no-one's lackey" Bowser insisted. Joe shook his head politely.

"Of course you're not, you're a king. That's why we'd like to offer you a position as a general in our army" Joe clarified "You and your koopas would join us, and you yourself would have a position of power and authority in our empire. And when we've killed Charlie Brown and conquered the world, you will be given this world to rule for your services"

"Hmm..." Bowser was starting to like the sound of this, but still couldn't be sure he could trust this boy.

"And how do I know you're not just some powerless dope who's making all this up?" Bowser asked. Joe covered his fist with dark energy and blasted one of the koopas in the corner of the room, blasting him out of existence. everyone in the room gasped, with the exception of Bowser, who looked... grudgingly impressed.

"You got guts to do that to one of my minions right in front of me" Bowser admitted. He leaned in dangerously close to Joe's face "I wouldn't do that again" He threatened, but then leaned back "But I'm starting to seriously consider your offer"

Joe, who had remained unflinching, grinned again as Bowser asked "Now, about Mario's head on a platter-"

"Just say the word and I'll off him" Joe said, waving his hands casually. Bowser grabbed him by the scruff of the shirt and picked him up.

"If anybody kills him it's going to be me. And I don't want to, I just want him pounded into the ground" Bowser clarified. Joe pulled himself free and nodded.

"Ok then, I can do that for you too" Joe said calmly.

"You sure you can do that?" Bowser asked, not one to be convinced that a child could beat the opponent he'd spent years battling. Joe nodded confidently. Kamek looked at Joe with a searching look, got up on the table so he was at Bowser's level and whispered into his ear.

"I must say sire, from what I can sense he's at least as powerful as that boy the Mario brothers accompanied. He could very well do as he says" Kamek explained, earning a nasty smile from Bowser.

"Hmm... I still don't know if I can trust you kid... but what the hell. I've got nothing to lose, count me in" Bowser said.

"Excellent. Glad to have you aboard" Came a new voice, and Bowser looked over Joe to see Dr Eggman and Thibault step out of the shadows aswell. Bowser frowned.

"Hey, who are you two?" Bowser asked rudely.

"Oh, yes, allow me to introduce my colleagues, Ivo Robotnik and Thibault. They'll stay to help us work out the terms of our new partnership" Joe answered. Eggman held out his hand so Bowser could shake it.

"Always a pleasure to meet a fellow villain" Eggman said. Bowser looked at his hand and grabbed it in his own enormous one, crushing Eggman's hand and earning a pained but muffled cry of pain from the scientist. Thibault meanwhile had noticed the cage Patty and the princess were trapped in, and laughed his head off at the sight of Peppermint Patty locked up.

"Well it's about time somebody finally locked that beast up!" Thibault laughed loudly. Peppermint Patty growled.

"Oh yeah, Thibault. Well why don't you come over here and say that to my face you coward!" Peppermint Patty yelled. Thibault sneered.

"Alright, I will" Thibault said arrogantly, walking right up in front of the cage and saying "It's about time somebody locked you-GAH!" Thibault was sent flying back into the table as Patty punched him in the face through the bars, looking quite pleased with herself as she did so. The other villains looked down at the dazed Thibault with disgust, shaking their heads.

"Yeah, he's a blockhead. So, do we still have a deal?" Joe asked.

As the three villains began discussing their new alliance, and of course what that would mean for their mutual enemies, Peppermint Patty and Princess Peach watched on in worry, giving each other concerned looks as the Doomship sailed closer and closer to Bowser's castle.

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Ok, and done. Ok, maybe those last few scenes didn't turn out very well, but I kinda lost track around that point. Most of the chapter was easy to write, the last parts weren't, so it might not have turned out as good as it should have been. But overall I like this chapter a lot, it really sets up this new arc well I should hope. This will only be a three part arc, hence why this chapter is so long. Seriously, I think this is the longest chapter so far. Which kinda surprised me. Oh well. Now, since I'm pretty sure most people here don't like reading really long paragraphs, I've decided to split my authors notes into several small

parts from now on at the bottom of the page, making it somewhat more of a trivia thing. See if that works better. So then, here are my points:

-Ok, so Mario is the first crossover, if you don't count Eggman's appearance since that's not a full crossover. I always knew I wanted Mario to be the first Hero to join Charlie Brown's side in this, video games are my main media interest, above cartoons and books and most other things, and Mario is pretty much the king of video games, so it felt only natural that he and his world should be the first to be explored to me. The Mario characters proved the best parts of this chapter to write, I've been doing a lot with the peanuts characters since I started writing for this section, so it's nice to get into writing some characters I don't normally write for. I did actually do a Mario story once, long ago. It's deleted now, it wasn't a good story and it actually made me feel kinda bad knowing how subpar my writing skills were then to where they are now. Not to say I'm now a top notch writer, I make a lot of mistakes and I'm learning all the time, but I am MUCH better now than when I first started. Given the fun I had writing characters like Mario, Bowser, Princess Peach and Wario, I can't wait to write for the rest of the characters planned for this arc, and the characters from other series.

-Of course, I really can't take all the credit for this chapter. The second scene, which introduces the Mario cast, was written by Supah-toon. And a great job he did at it. I had to edit it a bit, correct a few things and whatnot. Toad and Toadsworth were not in it and there were just all random Toads for example, and considering he writes everything as though he's writing for a cartoon I had to reformat it somewhat to make it flow with the rest of the chapter, though it is still close to exactly as how he originally wrote it. Funny story, this scene was not planned out by me, he just wrote it off the top of his head. My plan was just to have the chapter start with the Mario brothers sunbathing and discussing life when Bowser suddenly attacks the castle in the distance. The plan changed considerably when he finished his scene though. I'm not complaining, this works better. I also never planned Wario and Waluigi to be in this arc, they were going to appear much later, but considering Supah-toon managed to add them into his opening, I thought up a way to use them later in the chapter. I'm glad for it, their parts were some of my favourite moments this chapter.

-It occurs to me that Mario and Luigi might have seemed overpowered or just too good in this chapter. Well, that's not me portraying them as Gary Stu's. I've tried to emphasise here that they're seasoned veterans at the hero business. I mean, they've been fighting Bowser and other baddies for 28 years now in real time, I don't know how long it's been in-universe but it still must be a long time. They've been through countless adventures and fought their way out of all kinds of situations. I think they'd naturally be able to dispatch swarms of minor enemies with ease, and even vanquish more powerful foes with only slight difficulty. Obviously they're not invincible, as their fight with Kamek shows, but I wanted to emphasise how capable they both are. I'll say right now that Mario will be one of the major players in this story, after Charlie Brown and Sparky he'll probably serve as a sort of third leader among the heroes, so I need to emphasise what a bad a## he can truly be. And considering he only has powers through a set of power ups and his normal form is not all that impressive when compared to other great heroes like Superman or Goku, who are all enormously powerful, I needed to emphasise his

skill and experience to really make him stand out and demand respect. Plus, it provides a fun contrast to Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown, though probably one of the strongest beings in the universe even though he hasn't mastered anywhere near the full extent of that power yet, still doesn't have a whole lot of experience fighting, despite his victory over Joe Agate, whereas Mario, who's strength and ability's pale in comparison but who's experience and battle prowess are superior, handles himself better in this chapter. There'll continue to be a trend of this I think, but remember, Mario still only has minor superhuman capabilities, if he were forced to fight someone all powerful like Joe Agate or say Darkseid from Dc, and Freiza from Dragon Ball, he'd probably get thrashed because, experience aside he doesn't have anywhere near the strength to deal with them. Just some food for thought.

-I know there wasn't really enough development into certain character relations this chapter, but that's the best I could do because, honestly, Charlie Brown and the Mario brothers are both in a hurry when they meet up, so they don't have time to hang around and get to know each other. Interaction between the new group will get more focus next chapter, whenever that's out. Similarly, while I got to make a ton of references to the Mario series, I still feel that I haven't really delved much into that actual world this chapter. Oh well, I have two more chapters to dedicate to that.

-As for the villains in this chapter, I don't know if I got Bowser quite right, but I'll try harder next time. Kamek was an interesting villain to write, he'll probably have more focus in later chapters as well. I've even got a chapter centred on him in the planning stages somewhere down the line. Kamek's always been one of my favourite Mario villains due to his relationship with Bowser and position in the Koopa army. Apart from them I got to use most of the typical Mario enemies, koopas, goombas, shy guys, whomps. I'm sure everyone knows about them. If anyone doesn't get the reference to Hooktail, she's a dragon boss from Super Paper Mario. I haven't played any of those games myself and I don't think they're within main canon, but I enjoy shout outs. The octopus was from Super Mario Galaxy, King Kaliente, who actually swims in a lave pool, but I just thought it would be funny to include him. I plan to feature other enemies like this in later chapters, not all of them will just be cameos or jokes, some might have bigger roles, but it depends on the plot.

-Peppermint Patty finally gets a magor role in this chapter, and I must say I'm pretty happy with her scenes. Actually, probably my favourite individual line in this chapter is her quote "I'm no princess, I'm Peppermint Patty" Because I think that's so her. Peppermint Patty is famous for her tomboyish traits, she wouldn't want to be a princess if you paid her I think. I should say I'm surprised I haven't given Peppermint patty a more central role up until now, since she'll be a pretty important character as time goes on. I guess like a lot of the Peanuts gang she didn't have so much to do in previous chapters. She probably won't get much to do next chapter, being captured and all, but she'll be getting a bigger role after that. She's one of my favourite peanuts characters, and her and Charlie Brown are my favourite peanuts pairing after Sally and Linus, so you can bet I'll explore that at some point.

-While on the subject of Peanuts characters, I'm kinda disappointed with the whole reunion scene. I had no idea how to write that the way

I wanted it to go, so Charlie Brown's and Sally's reactions might not be all that great, and that whole brothers comment might kinda sour it, but it is what it is. Sally's a hard character to write for, there's a specific way she acts that's hard to capture. Still, I'm glad I got to utilise her a bit in this chapter, hopefully I'll do a better job with her going forward. Sorry if that last scene with them is rushed though.

-I kinda wonder why the koopalings weren't at the wedding? I knew I never wanted them at it, I wanted to save them for the last chapter in this arc, but I couldn't really think of a good reason to explain their absence that didn't really slow things down too much. I guess I'll just leave it ambiguous. And anyway, Bowser's not the type to think every little thing through. If he was he might actually win a few times.

-On the wedding itself, I'll be honest, that was a tricky thing to write since I don't go to a lot of weddings and I'm not sure about all the details. I based a lot of the things Bowser insisted on skipping over on something I read about Christian weddings. I don't know if Bowser or anyone in the Mushroom Kingdom is Christian, they probably have their own unexplored religions in that world, but I don't have anything official to base that on so I just went with the whole Christian wedding scenario. Hope I didn't get too much wrong. It wasn't supposed to be a proper wedding anyway. There were supposed to be several small scenes showing the wedding and the heroes trying to rush to stop it, but this didn't work as well in writing so I altered it. Don't think this really works better, but as long as I got it written.

So, I guess that's all the main points I can think of. I just wanted to get the first chapter of this arc out as soon as I could, I've got so much to do before Christmas if I want to live up to my promise of updating my other two stories. Hopefully things will work out. I'm actually kinda disappointed that I have to take a break from this story now, it was just getting really fun to write, but I guess it's not a very big deal. Gotta think about priorities. I'm just hoping this story doesn't get deleted. It's actually been happening a lot lately I notice, a whole bunch of stories are getting taken down for violating even the smallest and most insignificant rules that no one even pays attention too except the really super attentive people, and the people who report stories to be taken down are just jerks who don't warn you and really don't have anything better to do with their lives than getting other peoples stories taken down. Honestly, I don't see anyone complaining about all the stories about musicians and bands over in the X-overs section, but stories that allow OC submission and whatever are being taken down. I'm particularly sore about this at the moment because my favourite story, P-nuts protectors, was unexpectedly taken down without notice. It's one of Supah-Toon's stories, and he's REALLY not happy about it. Neither am I! And he doesn't know whether he'll be able to recover any of it to repost it without the whole oc submission thing. Sad, isn't it. Well, I've gone on long enough. Hope you all enjoy the chapter, see you next update.

9. You're in the Mushroom Kingdom, CB pt 2

**Tiger Lover 16: Hi folks. Been a while I know. I'll save most of what I have to say for the bottom notes, but I'd first like to say

I'm sorry I haven't updated my other stories. I understand some people must be frustrated, but I can't really write for a story unless I feel inspired to write for it, and a lot of the inspiration I am getting recently is to write this story. I will eventually get back to my other stories, I want to continue them, but I'm going to stop making promises for when I might update because I'm feeling guilty every time I fail to live up to them. Anyway, enough talk, enjoy the chapter**

* * *

><p>Chapter 8, You're in the Mushroom Kingdom Charlie Brown, Part 2

The first glimpse of sunlight shone over the hills far from the Mushroom Castle. As the sun grew higher the drawbridge to the castle slowly lowered, and from the entrance emerged our heroes. Charlie Brown, Sparky and Mario walked at the front of the pack, Luigi and Snoopy walking close behind them with Woodstock perched on the latter's shoulder. Behind them Yoshi trotted along, Sally riding on his back. Bringing up the rear of the group were Toad and Toadsworth, who were just seeing the group off.

After that minor incident with Snoopy and Woodstock absconding with the Toad Brigade's space ship, the group had returned to the castle for a short break and were now prepared to make the long journey to rescue princess Peach and Peppermint Patty from Bowser's clutches.

The heroes stopped at the end of the drawbridge, turning to face the cheerfully waving Toad and the respectful Toadsworth.

"Well, so long, have a safe trip!" Toad called out.

"Take good care of yourselves, and see the princess returned safely" The older Toad instructed.

"Don't worry, we will. You guys just look after the castle. And try not to let it get taken over by some other villain while we're gone" Mario replied.

"Aww, you don't have to worry about that, everything will be fine" Toad said confidently. No sooner had he said that did the archway leading into the castle suddenly collapse upon itself. Toad and Toadsworth looked back in disbelief, turned back to the Mario brothers and smiled uneasily.

"You might want to get a squad to repair all the damage while we're out" Luigi commented. After a few more goodbyes the group finally set out, walking around the castle and setting off down a narrow road leading into vast green fields filled with blocks, bushes, ledges, oddly rectangular and square hills, and many other strange things that you would only find here in the Mushroom world.

Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock stared around in wonder at everything they saw, admiring every bit of unearthly fauna they passed. While at the front of the party, Mario, Charlie Brown, and Sparky talked things through.

"Well, to answer your question, there are many, many castles on the

way to Darkland, strongholds either belonging to Toads or other races, or castles that have been abandoned for whatever reason. Bowser and his minions normally stop at a few of these castles on their way home, so if we're quick we can catch up with them and rescue Patty and the Princess without having to travel all the way to Darkland. Still, I wouldn't set my hopes too high if I were you, Bowser does have a gift for making quick getaways" Mario explained to Charlie Brown, who nodded.

"Well, we can try. We have to try, Peppermint Patty and your princess are counting on us" Charlie Brown said urgently.

"They are, but let's just try to stay calm and keep moving" Sparky said prudently. Charlie Brown responded by taking a deep breath and walking at a slightly quicker pace.

"I ought to tell you now, the path to these-a castles is long, this could-a take us at least a couple of days. We can't all fly at-a near light speed like you can, and I wouldn't recommend you flying on ahead and trying to-a handle everything yourself. Bowser may not be very smart, but he's-a very dangerous, rush into a battle and you're asking to get killed" Mario forewarned.

"Ok then. So, how long is the way?" Charlie Brown asked, not really wanting to take too long to finish this because of all the other friends he would have to find once Peppermint Patty and Sally were safely back at the light palace.

"Well, the grasslands are-a the easiest terrain to navigate, so we should-a be at the end castle by midday. If-a luck's on our side, Bowser just might have docked the Doomship there and we can-a rush in. He normally gets away when it's just me and Luigi and perhaps Yoshi, but with yours and Sally's help we just might finish it there" Mario said optimistically. Charlie Brown lightened up at that.

As the three leaders of the group discussed their strategy, Sally and the others dedicated more time to taking in the sites.

"So how do the blocks stay up?" Sally asked Luigi as Yoshi led her under a row of floating brick blocks.

"Magic. That's-a really all I can-a say, magic rules over logic in this world. The blocks are-a held up by an invisible force, but they can be dragged down. I know there are-a some enthusiasts who collect them, they don't like Mario and-a me very much because we make the blocks "Valueless" when we take the coins or power-ups inside them. But that's-a basically the point of them anyway, most of the kingdoms income comes from coins collected from these blocks. And a few power-ups can make menial labour a lot less excruciating. But to get back to the point of your question, no one really knows specifically _why _they float; they just do" Luigi explained. Sally nodded all the way through his speech, still gazing at the fauna.

Behind them Snoopy and Woodstock took up the rear of the group, though Luigi made a conscious effort to keep looking back at them to make sure they didn't wander off. The two animals mostly just observed their surroundings, thinking of what fun things they might get up to.

About ten minutes into the trek the group passed by a series of

rivers and wooden bridges, while crossing one of them Mario pointed out a couple of round red fish hopping in and out of the water.

"See those, they're Cheep-Cheeps" Mario said. Sally frowned.

"What kind of a silly name is that?" She asked.

"It's the kind of name Toads give to what they first thought were flying fish. That's not the important thing though" Luigi replied "As silly as they sound, Cheep-Cheeps are pesky little things. Get too close and they'll jump out and latch onto your heads, and it's very difficult to pull them off"

While the Mario brothers were explaining this Snoopy and Woodstock were standing on the edge of the bridge, looking down at the water. A cheep-cheep suddenly shot up and grabbed Woodstock in it's mouth, falling back into the water afterwards. Snoopy stared at the spot Woodstock had been standing for a moment before letting out a surprised "Gah!". Then without a moments hesitation he dived into the river. Splashes and ripples spread over the waters surface before Snoopy emerged on the bank, dragging the Cheep-Cheep with him and proceeding to do the Heimlich maneuver on the rotund fish. After a few tries the fish finally coughed Woodstock back up. The little bird simply sat blinking in a puddle of fish spit.

"You alright Woodstock?"_ Snoopy asked. Woodstock blinked a few more times before shaking himself dry and tweeting a response. Snoopy sighed and gave the fish a stern look _"And what do you have to say for yourself?"_

The Cheep-Cheep made a gurgling sound, brought it's tailfin up to Snoopy's face and shook itself, smacking the beagle repeatedly until he let go and proceeding to hop back into the river. Snoopy rubbed his face a bit then shook his paw at the water, growling a few choice remarks.

The duo soon re-joined the rest of the group on the stroll. Charlie Brown gave them a brief look before noticing a few goombas marching around up ahead.

"Well, looks like we're in for a fight" Charlie Brown said. Mario and Luigi chuckled.

"It's-a only a couple of goombas Charlie, relax" Mario said calmly, he looked back at Yoshi "You know what to-a do buddy?"

Yoshi perked up and nodded vigorously, rushing up to the front of the pack. As the six goombas neared they eventually noticed the heroes coming up and broke into a run. Yoshi held his arms out, as though instructing everybody to stay back, and opened his mouth. The dinos' extremely long tongue shot out and rapped around the goomba in the front, dragging it into the mouth of Yoshi, who devoured him in one large gulp. Yoshi immediately proceeded to swallow the other five goombas, eating them all before they'd got within five feet of him.

"Yosh, Yoshi" Yoshi said victoriously. Charlie Brown, Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock were all stunned. The latter two were the first to get over it and began clapping, while Charlie Brown just stared.

"So that's what you meant by he can take care of himself" Charlie Brown said, astounded. Mario nodded.

"Still got any-a doubts your sister's not well protected?" Mario asked, knowing the answer.

Speaking of Sally, the younger Brown was petting and rubbing Yoshi's head.

"You sure showed them didn't you" Sally praised, as Yoshi began rubbing his head against her belly in a cat-like manner "Hmm, maybe I oughta have you do the same thing to the next kid that laughs at my show and tell project?"

"Yoshi doesn't eat people. Besides, I think there are-a morality issues with dinosaurs eating children" Luigi commented. Sally shrugged innocently.

"I was only being sarcastic. No need to take everything so literally" Sally said, urging Yoshi to start walking again.

And so with that little distraction out of the way, the group continued on their journey through the plains of the Mushroom Kingdom. They walked. And walked. And Walked... and walked... and walked a little more... strolled, marched, trotted through many, many more fields... then walked a little more... and walked... and kept on walking for what felt like hours on end. It wasn't long until Sally's nerves finally got the better of her and she screamed out in frustration.

"Good grief! How much farther away is this stupid castle?!" Sally yelled at the top of her lungs, startling her companions. Mario turned cautiously to look at her.

"Um, still pretty far. We've-a only been walking for-" Mario quickly checked his watch "One hour and-a twelve minutes"

"Well it feels like forever!" Sally said, folding her arms grumpily. Luigi shrugged innocently.

"Yeah, I suppose it does seem a lot longer when you're just walking endlessly. Maybe we should play a game" The green-clad plumber suggested.

"Like what?" Charlie Brown wondered. Luigi hummed thoughtfully.

"Well... how about "I spy"?" He proposed. Sally waved her hand dismissively.

"Pass. That game is for babies" Sally complained. Luigi frowned.

"Hey, I play "I spy"" Luigi protested. Sally blushed and looked away, too awkward to say anything.

"We could always sing a song" Mario suggested. That garnered much interest from Luigi.

"Hey, yeah. And I know just the one" Luigi said, and then cleared his

throat. Mario and Yoshi's eyes widened in shock, the latter covered his ears while Mario tried to protest

"W-wait, I didn't mean y-" but too late. Luigi had already begun to sing, in a very loud, awful voice:

"Over the river, and through the wood,
to Grandfathers House we go-"

Charlie Brown, Sally, Snoopy, Woodstock and even Sparky all covered their ears. Luigi's singing was so bad that it actually pained them to hear it, even Sparky's despite him being a spirit. Luigi himself didn't notice their pain, having closed his eyes the moment he started singing, so he just kept on doing it.

"The horse knows the way to carry the slay,
through the white and drifted snow!

Ooooooooooh, over the river, and through the-" Luigi was, quite thankfully, cut off as Snoopy desperately threw a pebble at the back of his head. The younger Mario brother squawked in pain, while everyone else just sighed and gasped as their ears ceased to ache.

"Ow. Hey, what gives?" Luigi asked, turning around to face Snoopy, who waved at him with an apologetic look.

"Luigi, might I remind you of last Sunday at the bar" Mario interjected, rubbing his left ear. Luigi thought for a moment.

"Oh, yeah, karaoke night. I sang summer nights and everyone..." Comprehension dawned on Luigi's face "... Ran out screaming... Oh, right" Luigi turned to the rest of the party with an impish look "Sorry kids, sometimes I forget what an atrocious singer I am"

"Oh, it wasn't that bad" Charlie Brown said, hoping to keep Luigi from feeling too bad about himself. He knew what that was like. Unfortunately, Sally didn't seem to catch the meaning of that.

"What are you talking about, his voice sounds like a Howler Monkey choking on a-"

"Sally!" Charlie Brown cut his sister off with a loud whisper. Sally glared at him for a second before catching on, then turning to look Luigi right in the face. She gulped.

"Um, and by that I mean-"

"It's ok Sally, I know you're right" Luigi said with a sigh, walking on. The rest of the group exchanged awkward looks before following after him.

Nobody dared to speak again for a good ten minutes. However, boredom set back in quickly.

"So, singing and games are out, what else can we do to pass the time?" Sally wondered. Sparky floated down between the group.

"You could just talk. Seriously, with all this spare time I'm surprised you all don't take the chance to get to know each other better" Said Sparky.

"Oh, yeah. I guess that would be the obvious thing to do, huh" Charlie Brown scratched his head, embarrassed he hadn't thought of that much earlier.

"Well, I'm-a up for it" Mario said with a shrug "Well, you and Sally already know a little about us, mind-a telling us something about yourselves?"

"Ok. Well, we're pretty normal... or, we live normal lives at least" Charlie Brown began, taking a moment to think about what he could discuss "We come from Birchwood, it's a small rural town. I play baseball, though I'm not very good at it, and I fly kites... I have even less luck at that. I also like football... I'm terrible at that..."

"To be fair Lucy's more to blame though. She always pulls the ball away before he can kick it and he goes flying" Sally clarified. The Mario brothers and Yoshi winced

"Ouch" Said Luigi.

"Yeah, ouch" Charlie Brown rubbed his back as the memories repeated in his head.

"Anything you are-a good at then?" Mario asked. Charlie Brown took a long time to reply.

"... Well, I guess I did pretty well fighting Joe Agate, but other than that you can pretty much describe me as a screw up" Charlie Brown sighed. Mario raised an eyebrow and patted his shoulder.

"Aw, it-a can't be that bad" Mario said kindly.

"Actually, the truth is it's a lot more depressing. But I'd rather not talk much about that right now" Charlie Brown replied. Mario nodded in understanding.

"Ok then, so talk about-a something you want to discuss instead" Mario suggested. Charlie Brown hummed while thinking it through. Not exactly a socialite, Charlie Brown hardly ever met new people in Birchwood that would hold a conversation with him for more than five minutes, so he wasn't even sure where to go now that baseball and kite flying were out of the way. And Mario and Luigi already knew about Snoopy's antics and his powers, so what would the next most interesting thing about him be?

"Well... I have a pen-pal" Charlie Brown finally replied.

"Oh, I had-a one of those once" Luigi chimed in from behind.

"Really?" Charlie Brown and Sally asked, both far more interested in hearing about the Mario brothers than discussing themselves.

"Yeah, it was back in-a my plumbing days. This foreign girl called Gretta, I don't-a remember what country she was-a from. I remember

we-a used to talk about our different cultures and-a stuff, and I think she kinda liked me" Luigi's cheeks reddened as he said that.

"Ooh, did you ever meet and kiss her?" Sally asked, a romantic at heart. Luigi sighed.

"Maybe I-a would have. I'd booked a flight to-a go meet her, but I injured my back a few days before that during a plumbing job. I sent a letter to say I wasn't-a coming, but I kinda left out the why part..." Luigi explained awkwardly. Charlie Brown looked at him sympathetically, knowing the response couldn't have been good.

"So what did she say?" Charlie Brown asked, but Luigi remained silent. Instead Mario answered for him.

"She didn't say anything. But I'm-a guessing she was pretty ticked off, because she then sent Luigi a parcel. When he-a opened it a pie shot out and-a splatted him in the face" Mario said. It took great effort for Charlie Brown and Sally not to laugh at that imagery.

"Yeah, and it was a cherry pie, and she knew I was allergic to those. My-a face was swollen for two weeks after, I couldn't go out in public once" Luigi said, throwing his hands in the air in an exaggerated manner "I never got back in touch with her after that. Oh wait, I did once soon after... the only response I-a got was another parcel containing a rabid weasel..."

"Rabbit weasel?" Sally blinked "I didn't know you could breed them"

"He said rabid weasel, Sally. Rabid as in it had rabies" Charlie Brown corrected. Sally hastily thought of a cover up.

"Um, I knew that. I was just joking to lighten the mood" Sally said. Charlie Brown rolled his eyes. They then widened and he turned back to Luigi.

"Wait, wouldn't getting attacked by a rabid weasel give you rabies? How'd you survive that?"

Luigi shrugged nonchalantly "I had a good doctor"

"Thanks" Said Mario.

Another few seconds of silence passed before Mario spoke up again "Ok, so why don't you tell us something about yourself Sally?"

"Oh, ok. Well, I'm eleven going on twelve, I have blond hair and usually wear a blue or pink spotted dress" Sally replied. Everyone gave her odd looks, Yoshi even stopped walking to stare back at her strangely "... What?"

"Um, I meant something that's not obvious and that we don't already know" Mario replied in a deadpan manner.

"Oh, right. Well, I like the easy life. No sports or kites for me, my favourite past time is to lay back in my beanbag and watch tv. I'm not lazy though, I like an adventure as much as the next kid. And

also like the next kid, I HATE school. It's not just that the teacher always asks me questions I don't know, but the stupid textbooks don't teach me anything anyway. All that new math stuff they're still trying to teach us is unbearable. I remember one time in kindergarden I wanted to know what two and two is, and my stupid book just gave me a bunch of equations that would only make sense to Steven Hawking, and even he'd have to think for a moment about it! Where was I? Oh yeah, I'm also sweet and sincere, and my boyfriend is Linus, he's my sweet baboo" Sally clapped her hands together and began fantasising at that last part, hearts rising up around her head. Mario and Luigi gave them a curious look before turning to Charlie Brown for clarification.

"Linus is my best friend, he's trapped on another world. And he and Sally aren't in a relationship, she's just saying that. Actually, Linus refuses to return her feelings" Charlie Brown explained plainly.

"He loves me really, he's just shy" Sally waved off her brothers remark. Mario gave Sally an amused look and chuckled inwardly. How he remembered being a child in love... he really hoped it worked out better for Sally.

The heroes passed by a series of hills, all of which varied in shape. Some were tall and oval, and others were rectangular. The oval hills were covered completely in grass, while the rectangle ones mostly only had a layer of grass on the top while the rest of the hill was dirt. Charlie Brown gave these hills an odd look, and in his distraction he wound up inadvertently walking into one. Falling on his back, Charlie Brown looked up to find a particularly large mountainside standing in the way. Charlie Brown wondered how he'd missed something so tall.

"Well now what are we supposed to do?" Sally complained. She had reason to be grumpy, the mountainside, Charlie Brown now realised, stretched for seemingly miles to the east and west, creating a seemingly impassable wall.

"I could always fly us over" Charlie Brown suggested, floating slightly above the ground to emphasise. Mario shook his head politely.

"Could, but the path is very steep on top of that hill, and it's a long way across. Easier to take the underground route" Mario said, walking towards a nearby bush.

"Underground?" Charlie Brown asked Luigi.

"Yep, it's a series of tunnels beneath the surface. You can enter it through certain pipes. It's the quickest way to get around the mountains" Luigi explained.

"Ah, here it is!" Mario called out, moving the bush aside to reveal a warp pipe. Sally gave the green pipe a questionable look, which turned to shock as Mario said "Ok, everyone down the pipe"

"What!?" Sally exclaimed, earning curious stares from her companions.

"What's wrong?" Luigi asked.

"You want us to go sliding down a random pipe? Nuh-uh, there's no way I'm doing something that gross" Sally declared while folding her arms. Mario scratched his head.

"It's not a sewer pipe silly, it's perfectly clean" Mario said, wiping his gloved hand against the inside of the pipe and showing it to Sally, revealing his glove to still be perfectly clean. Sally looked at him and hummed.

"Yeah, well I still don't feel comfortable with it" Sally replied. Charlie Brown sighed as he tried to reason with his sister.

"I've been down one of these pipes Sally, it's not much different than going down a slide. And you like slides" Charlie Brown pointed out, but Sally still wouldn't listen. Luigi sighed at her stubbornness and put a finger to his mustache, looking thoughtful. A light bulb appeared above his head as he had an idea.

"Oh, Yoshi" Luigi called, pulling out what might have been a plum. Yoshi, whom Sally was still riding on, looked at the fruit as his eyes widened. The little dinosaur began hopping around excitedly as Luigi walked towards the pipe, keeping the plum in plain sight. Sally watched him suspiciously, quickly catching on.

"Hey, what do you-" Sally began, stopping herself as Luigi threw the supposed plum down the warp pipe.

"Go get it" Luigi called jovially. Yoshi cheered and ran forward, ignoring Sally's protests as he jumped down the pipe, taking her with him. Mario, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock looked stunned as Luigi turned to them with a grin.

"That was pretty clever of you, little bro" Mario complimented Luigi's craftiness. Luigi chuckled appreciatively.

"Well you know, I do have other talents apart from being the comic relief sidekick" Luigi said, turning around and walking to the pipe. A few feet away he tripped on a rock, causing him to go flying into the pipe face first with a loud "Waaaah!"

Mario and Charlie Brown exchanged odd looks, the former rolled his eyes before jumping into the pipe himself, followed soon after by the latter. Snoopy got up on top of the pipe next, imitated the position of a world famous diver and dived straight in. Woodstock chirped a few unintelligible words before flapping his wings, flying in loops around the pipe as he slowly ascended and then flipping around several times above it before he lost control and just fell into the pipe.

When Charlie Brown came out the other end he found himself in a dark tunnel, though surprisingly not as dark as a tunnel underground with no direct sunlight should be. He could see most of his surroundings quite clearly. To his side he found Sally and Yoshi. Sally seemed positively ecstatic.

"Wow, that _was_ _just_ like going down a slide. Can we do it again? Please?!" Sally asked with all her childish glee. Charlie Brown rolled his eyes, not sure if he should be amused or exasperated by his sister's hypocrisy.

Charlie Brown took a moment to take in his surroundings a bit more. The terrain was naturally rocky, the path was somewhat narrow, though the group could all stand together it seemed they couldn't go any other way but forward. There seemed to be a few blocks floating around or otherwise embedded into the ground, unlike the blocks he'd seen above ground these were dark blue and had a checkered pattern. Charlie Brown suspected they would hurt a bit more if you tried bumping them with your head.

Charlie Brown was brought out of his thoughts as Snoopy suddenly flew out of the pipe behind him, knocking the boy down as Snoopy landed on his back in a standing position.

"Perfect landing" Snoopy gloated. He looked down to see Charlie Brown looking up with an annoyed expression. "Oh, excuse me" He thought sheepishly, hopping off the boy and allowing him to get up. Woodstock came flying out of the pipe the next second, bouncing off the back of Charlie Brown's head before being caught by Snoopy right before he could hit the ground.

"So, how long is this tunnel?" Charlie Brown asked, rubbing the back of his head.

"Eh, how long is a piece-a string?" Mario asked, shrugging "Just-a kidding, though truthfully I never have-a taken the time to-a measure the distance. If you're going by-a the time it takes to get through it however, I'd say-a ten minutes at the most. Just be aware of-a pit-falls and ledges you have to jump over"

"Oh, and-a perhaps the occasional moving platforms and pillars of-a conjoined fireballs" Luigi chimed in.

"Wait, pillars of conjoined what?" Sally was confused.

"Luigi, that's-a castle based obstacles, you don't find walls of-a fire in the underground" Mario pointed out.

"Oh yeah. Oops, sorry 'bout that" Luigi scratched his head sheepishly "Yeah, forget what I said, but-a the platform things true"

"Why does it feel like normality is a foreign concept in this world?" Charlie Brown wondered out loud.

With the explanations out of the way the group walked on through the tunnel. The path was surprisingly flat and even for the most part, though as Mario said there were plenty of times where they had to jump over large rocks in their way. The walls on their left side often sported large holes they could see through, Charlie Brown spotted an underground lake and a cavern full of crystals, which Sally seemed eager to explore but Mario insisted that the group keep moving on the straight path. Sally put up a bit of a fuss at that, but considering Yoshi was moving her everywhere and he tended to listen a bit more to his actual owners, she couldn't do anything about it. All in all, everything appeared quiet.

"So, do you mind if I ask why there are pipes leading to underground tunnels and rooms inside castles?" Charlie Brown asked Mario after five minutes.

"They go to-a more places than-a that, depending on what warp pipe you take you could-a end up anywhere in-a the world. Nobody really knows where they-a came from, they've-a been here for-a thousands of years. I guess-a some ancient civilization discovered plumbing and-a used pipes as an inspiration for some-a long range transportation system" Mario replied.

While her brother expressed amazement at this revelation, Sally and Yoshi trailed along at the back of the pack. With not much excitement happening since leaving the castle Sally was starting to become bored. Considering everything she had heard about Bowser and the koopas she expected to have witnessed a few giant monster battles by now, but no. This whole time the most exciting thing she'd seen was Yoshi swallowing a couple of walking mushrooms. Patting the side of Yoshi's head in frustration Sally looked around, noticing another tunnel leading away from the group, shrouded in darkness but for one faint glow in the distance. She perked up, thinking it must be some kind of treasure. With a quick look to make sure none of her teammates were paying her any mind, Sally motioned Yoshi to stop. The cutesy dinosaur stretched his head back to look at her.

"Hey Yoshi, I think I saw some food down that tunnel" Sally whispered craftily to him. Yoshi began wagging his tail in a dog-like manner and immediately changed his course down the dark tunnel. The rest of the group failed to notice, all listening to Mario talk about the origin of the koopas and why the Toads wore mushroom shaped hats. Only Sparky, whom Sally had failed to take note of because he had made himself invisible, realized her absence after a few moments.

"Would everyone kindly look behind themselves for a moment" Sparky called out to the rest of the group, who all looked back to face him, at the same time noticing Sally and Yoshi's disappearance. While the Mario brothers scratched their heads Charlie Brown sighed.

"Which way?" Charlie Brown asked tiredly.

"I have a good guess. Follow me" Sparky said, leading the group back the other way.

With Sally and Yoshi meanwhile, the former was beginning to regret her decision. This part of the tunnel was unreasonably dark compared to the rest of the underground she had seen, which kind of made a lot more sense considering they were underground. And the light she had seen earlier had faded, and she was already starting to feel like they were totally lost.

"Ok, maybe we should go back before we get in trouble" Sally said. Yoshi, who was now visibly terrified of his inky black surroundings, nodded and chirped in agreement "Only question is... which way is back again?"

"Yoshi" Yoshi replied in an "I dunno?" fashion. A moment later the dinosaur tripped up on an unseen rock, and as he fell he sent Sally flying a good ten feet forward on her stomach, getting her dress covered in dust in the process.

"Oh yes, real nice" Sally complained. As she got up and dusted herself off, she noticed a light just like the one she'd seen earlier shining not too far ahead of her. Grinning eagerly, Sally turned back

to her dinosaur buddy and said "Come on Yoshi, I think I just found the treasure"

Yoshi got up and followed her obediently. After a quick run, Sally found herself at what looked like the end of this part of the tunnel. Near the wall the source of the light floated above the ground, a single gold coin. Sally raised an eyebrow.

"That's it? One gold coin?" Sally said, moving forward and taking hold of the shining coin. She admired her reflection in the coin for a moment and turned it over.

"Well, it's not much, but at least it's treasure" Sally commented. Yoshi walked up to her, and she held the coin out to show him "Look Yoshi, gold" Yoshi saw his own big nosed reflection in the coin and giggled, poking his tongue out to see if that image would reflect in it too. Sally giggled at his antics, before her attention was caught by an odd noise from behind her. She turned around to see a large brown mole dig it's way out of the ground, looking right at her with it's sealed eyes.

"Aww, how cute" Sally said, tapping Yoshi's shoulder and pointing the creature out to him "Look Yoshi, a cute little mole"

To her surprise Yoshi screamed at the sight of the mole and launched his tongue at it, dragging the mole into his mouth and swallowing it. Sally was horrified.

"Now what was that about?!" Sally demanded. Yoshi tried to explain his actions to her, but naturally nothing he said made any sense to her as it was in his own language. He was interrupted as the ground around the two of them began to shake, and the next thing you know Sally and Yoshi were surrounded by dozens of identical moles. Yoshi cowered behind Sally, who herself was surprised by their sudden appearance but not quite scared.

"Um... hi there, little moles" Sally said with a wave. The moles all made angry faces at her, which made her nervous. Then, one of the moles, who was oddly wearing a pair of sunglasses, hopped down in front of her.

"Hey toots, that coin's our. Give it back now or else" The mole spoke up. Sally's eyes widened and she gaped at it. Then her expression changed to a frown.

"Did you just call me toots?" Sally asked.

"Yeah, toots, now give us our coin" The mole demanded, in a much rudier tone, only managing to tick Sally off further.

"Oh no, first things first, you do not call me toots, got it!" Sally said defiantly. The rest of the moles made angry squeaking sounds and shook their paws at her, as the clear leader folded his arms and tapped his foot. Yoshi tapped Sally's shoulder and said his name, trying to make her see reason, but she ignored him.

"You're in our tunnel girly, so I'll call you whatever I dang want. Now I'm going to tell you one last time, give back our coin or we'll pound you" The mole said viciously. Sally slapped him.

"Now where do you get off threatening young ladies like that. You better apologise now or I'm not giving you anything" Sally said angrily. The mole rubbed his head and growled, as the rest of the moles surrounding Sally and Yoshi growled with him and some began bumping their fists together. Sally finally realised the danger she was in and gulped.

Back where the dark tunnel began, Charlie Brown, Mario, Sparky and the other arrived and were preparing to go looking for their wandering friends. But then suddenly they were all knocked back as Yoshi, Sally riding on his back again, came speeding out of the tunnel and back down the path they had been going earlier.

"Run, run! Run for your lives!" Sally yelled. Charlie Brown and friends looked after her in confusion then glanced back down the dark tunnel, where they saw the incoming figures of the moles charging at them, some now wielding clubs. Mario's eyes widened while Luigi let out a very cartoony scream of terror.

"Uh oh, Monty Moles" Mario gasped.

"What are they?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Something you really want to run away from!" Luigi yelled as he got up and ran after Sally and Yoshi, screaming his head off. Mario quickly followed suit, sans the screaming part. With a quick look back to the incoming stampede of moles, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock ran after them, while Sparky reassumed his invisible state. The moles burst out into the main tunnel all at once and charged after the heroes, ready to pound them.

After a few frantic moments of running, Woodstock suddenly tripped up. His tweets of terror reached the ears of Snoopy and Charlie Brown, who looked back at him in concern. Snoopy wasted no time in running to his friends aid, but when he got to him the moles were almost upon them. Snoopy stared at the horde in fear, but then he suddenly took on a brave and heroic stance.

"_This looks like a job for-" Snoopy pulled out a black domino mask and put it on over his eyes "-The Masked Marvel!"_

As the moles prepared to beat down upon the beagle, Snoopy suddenly assumed a karate stance and aimed a flying kick at the lead mole, sending him flying back and into five other moles, knocking them all down. The rest of the moles stopped for a second to gasp at this development, all looking at Snoopy. The masked beagle motioned for them to come at him, to which they all charged forth.

With amazing acrobatic skills, Snoopy leapt over the moles, kicking the two at the back of the pack before landing on his hands and backflipping back onto his feet, before charging at the Monty moles from behind. Swinging his fists wildly, the Masked Marvel sent the moles flying in all direction. When he had got them all, the Marvel turned around and stood in a heroic fashion. Three of the club wielding moles got up and ran at him. Snoopy dodged several swipes from the wooden clubs, he poked one of the moles in both eyes and snatched his weapon, using it to disarm the other two and bonk them on the heads.

While these three were dazed, the other Monty Moles got up and made

to attack the Masked Marvel all at once. But Snoopy was ready for them. As the moles approached, the Masked Marvel kicked, punched, and leapfrogged over them all, dodging all their wild attack and sending the moles flying about the tunnel once more. Standing victoriously on a boulder, Snoopy gave a heroic pose and gloated.

"Ha ha, silly moles. You can not hope to compare to the awesome mightiness that is the Masked Marvel!"_ Snoopy declared in his most melodramatic voice, standing tall, heroic and arrogant above them all... and then a rock hit him in the face. Snoopy stumbled backwards and rubbed his face in pain, before shaking his fist and growling at the moles.

"Hey, who threw that!?"_ Snoopy demanded to know. The moles responded by throwing another rock at him. Then another, then another, and another, until a whole shower of rocks were flying at Snoopy. The Masked Marvel covered his face and tried backing away from the shower of pain, but he ended up slipping and landing hard on the floor. The Monty Moles seized the opportunity to dog pile on him and began to beat up the wannabe hero.

Charlie Brown and Woodstock watched the scene unfold. At first in awe at Snoopy's fighting prowess, the boy and the bird now looked on in concern for the pooch.

"Well, it was almost a heroic moment for him" Charlie Brown shrugged. Woodstock tweeted to him in a worried fashion, Charlie Brown nodded and fired a light beam at the pile of moles, who were all sent flying by the attack. Charlie Brown flew in and grabbed Snoopy, then flew off after Mario and Luigi. Woodstock grabbed onto the unconscious Snoopy's tail as they passed. The moles rubbed their heads and shook off the effect of the blast. The glasses wearing leader of the pack caught sight of Charlie Brown flying away and pointed it out to the others, leading them to resume their chase.

With the moles catching up in a surprisingly short amount of time, Charlie Brown flew at top speed down the tunnel. He was going so fast he didn't see Mario and Luigi running back to look for him until he crashed right into the latter. The two heroes rolled to a halt, stars circled Luigi's head as Snoopy and Woodstock went flying out of Charlie Brown's hands.

"Urgh... sorry, I'm so sorry" Charlie Brown muttered, Luigi waved his hand, looked serenely in the other direction and mumbled an incomprehensible reply. Mario waved his hand in front of his brothers face, worried about his almost delirious state. Luigi just stared down the tunnel in a goofy manner... until he caught sight of the incoming Monty Moles, then his senses quickly came back to him as he let out a squeak and got running again. Charlie Brown gathered up Snoopy and Woodstock and was led further into the tunnel by Mario.

"Don't-a worry, the next pipe's just up ahead" Mario told his young friend. Within another minute of running Charlie Brown could see the big green pipe appear in the distance, a wave of relief washed over him. The moles behind picked up their pace, growling loudly and ready to pummel.

Two more Monty Moles popped up from the ground in front of Mario and Charlie Brown with a loud "Ha ha", but were both quickly stomped back

into their holes as Mario and Charlie Brown simply jumped on them and kept on running.

Luigi stood by the side of the pipe, motioning frantically for his friends to jump in. Mario ran in head first, while Charlie Brown entered second with the animals in tow. Luigi glanced back at the oncoming horde, now just seconds away. He gave them a sly smile and a wave before hopping through the pipe too.

The heroes came out on a road in the middle of a lush valley, the hills that had blocked their path earlier would be visible in the distance if they turned around. Charlie Brown panted from fear and exhaustion, while Mario and Luigi merely took deep breaths and took a moment to regain their composes. Charlie Brown placed Snoopy down on the grass, Woodstock hopped off and began looking over his beagle buddy. Charlie Brown looked around and saw his sister and Yoshi, both panting even worse than him.

After everyone had had a moment to readjust themselves, Sparky reappeared and asked "Ok, so, is everyone unharmed?"

"Well, Snoopy took a beating, but other than that I think we're alright" Charlie Brown replied, looking at Snoopy. Woodstock had taken out a nurses hat and was currently taking the dogs temperature.

"What happened to him then?" Sparky asked, looking down at the beagle in concern.

"Well, he pulled out his old masked marvel disguise and decided to play superhero, it worked at first... but then he got cocky" Charlie Brown replied. Sparky nodded.

"Ok, sit down by his side and I'll instruct you on how to heal him" Sparky said. As Charlie Brown did as he was instructed Luigi looked back at the pipe and chuckled.

"Well, that-a sure was a close one. Not-a like those moles were ever a match for us anyway" Luigi said, pointing a finger to his chest boastfully. The leading Monty Mole popped up out of the pipe and threw a rock at the back of his head, sending Luigi falling on his face.

"And don't come back now, ya hear!" The Mole said in a tough voice, hopping back down the pipe. The rest of the group stared at the pipe for a moment before looking down at Luigi, who let out a depressed sigh while not moving from his face down position.

"Why am I always the victim to-a these kind of jokes?" Luigi asked out loud. Mario hoisted him back into an upright position and gave his brother a comforting pat on the back, before turning to Sally.

"By the way Sally, why-a did the Monty moles start-a chasing you in the first place?" He asked her. Sally straightened her frizzled hair before replying.

"Oh, it was because I grabbed some coin they all said belonged to them. It was floating around in the middle of a dark tunnel, how was I supposed to know it belonged to anyone?" Sally asked, holding up

said coin. Mario, Luigi and Sparky all looked at the coin and gave Sally a frown.

"Well no wonder. Monty moles hate it when people take their stuff. Why didn't you just give it back?" Sparky asked sternly. Sally shrugged.

"Hey, finders keepers. Besides, we got out of there alive, didn't we. Far as I'm concerned it's mine now. A gold coin like this is bound to buy me a lot of new bows" Sally said, playing around with the coin. Charlie Brown rolled his eyes and sighed at his sisters greed, while Sparky just gave her an uncertain look.

"I find it appropriate to tell you that Mushroom coins are only worth about a single dollar by your worlds expenses" Sparky told her. The smile suddenly vanished off of Sally's face, replaced by a look of blank surprise. She glanced down at the coin again, frowned, then walked up to the warp pipe in a huff and flicked the coin down it.

"Hey, moles! You can have your cheap gold back!" Sally called down the pipe. The sounds of the moles rejoicing echoed up the pipe, as did the things they said.

"Yes, the pretty shiny round thing is mine again!" Called the voice of the lead mole.

"Hey, can I hold it?" Asked another voice.

"No way, get your own pretty sphere, loser!"

"But I wanna hold it!"

"Me too!"

"Hey, let me take a look!"

"NO, NO, the coin is MINE!"

"Hey, get your paws off me!"

The sound of punching and biting and kicking echoed out of the pipe as the Monty moles clearly broke out into a brawl. Sally looked down the pipe curiously for a moment, before a disturbed expression filled her face and she backed away slowly.

After Charlie Brown successfully healed Snoopy's injuries and gave his sister a stern speech about how stealing from a pack of anthropomorphic moles is wrong and liable to get her and everyone else killed, which Sally only half listened to, the heroes continued on down their trek. None of them really wanted to talk about what had just happened, so they just kept silent for a moment until Charlie Brown grew curious as to the time.

"I'll-a check" Luigi said as Charlie Brown brought up the subject, pulling out a pocket watch from his overalls "It's-a five minutes to noon. Boy, time sure flies doesn't it?"

"Actually, we're-a making pretty good time" Mario supplied "We just-a passed the underground, we should be at-a the castle in about an

hour"

"An hour? That's good. Do you think Bowser will still be there?" Charlie Brown asked hopefully. Mario shrugged.

"Like I said earlier, I dunno. He could-a be? We'll-a just have to see when we get-a there. But it's-a likely" Mario replied, half-satisfying Charlie Brown "Saying that though, there's a village up ahead. We should stop and take a break"

"Good idea. I'm getting saddle sores from riding Yoshi all morning" Sally added, Yoshi made an apologetic noise as though believing such was his fault.

A village huh? Charlie Brown really didn't want to take too long in case they missed Bowser and it took them longer to rescue Patty and the princess. But then again, when would he next get the opportunity to visit a Toad village? Surely they wouldn't be there longer than they needed to. And it was coming up to lunch time, no doubt Snoopy would be begging for food soon, so he'd have to see to that.

"How far is this village?" Charlie Brown asked.

"It's-a just over this here hill" Luigi said, pointing to a small and easily climbable hill unlike the one they had come across earlier.

"Well, that was convenient" Snoopy commented.

"III IIII" Woodstock nodded.

The group walked up the hillside, when they made it to the top they were greeted by the site of a small village surrounded by a moat with a river nearby. The houses were all designed to look like the Mushroom caps of the Toads. Or at least the top halves were, the bottom halves were clearly wooden. It looked like a very peaceful and pleasant place.

"Wow, I'd like to live here" Sally commented, having the best viewpoint from atop Yoshi.

"Yeah, Toad architecture is-a pretty nice to look at, huh?" Luigi said.

"I would have thought a kingdom constantly under attack by an army of turtles would look a little more war torn, but this village looks like a real quiet and safe place" Charlie Brown said. Perhaps he was a living jynx, because no sooner had he spoken that sentence did a huge explosion echo from the towns centre, followed by several smaller explosions and panicked screams from the residents.

The heroes stared at the scene unfold with shocked expression. Mario and Luigi exchanged looks before charging down the path to the village. Yoshi quickly realized where they were going and followed, taking Sally with him. Charlie Brown took a bit longer to react, but when he realized where everyone was going he flew after them, Snoopy, Woodstock and Sparky following behind him.

The gang arrived at the gates of the village, where there were two statues of eyed mushrooms at either side. Charlie Brown and Mario

looked through the gates to see the attackers. There was a large tank moving around, with a Monty mole standing out of the cockpit. Hammer Bros were stationed around the village square, throwing their signature weapons in the directions of terrified citizens or else breaking windows. And at the centre of it all was a koopa that looked a lot like Bowser, but much younger and just barely taller than Mario, with shorter red hair and a babyish face, which was currently filled with devilish delight as he ordered the minions around.

"Who..." Charlie Brown began.

"Bowser Jr, Bowser's youngest child" Mario answered.

"And a big pain in-a the butt" Luigi continued "The little tyke is every bit as mean as his dad, though since he's a baby he's hardly as threatening. He's come up with a few schemes of his own, but usually he just likes bullying innocent Toads, like he's doing right now"

"So, I'm guessing we should all go stop him" Sally said.

"Yep" Mario nodded, kicking open the gates and leading the group inside the village.

At the centre of the square Bowser Jr stood laughing as his minions caused a fuss. The youngster was hopping around childishly, occasionally shooting fireballs at Toads trying to hide just to see their terrified reactions. He let out another laugh, which was interrupted by a shout of "Hey, Junior!"

Bowser Jr turned around, immediately receiving a boot to the face which sent him sliding back, his spikes leaving a few gashes in the ground. The koopa prince shook his head and looked up, seeing Mario, Luigi, Charlie Brown and the others standing heroically over him.

"Sorry sport, time to-a put an end to your mischief" Mario told him. Bowser Jr growled.

"Mario!" Jr said resentfully.

"Mario!" The Toads said joyously.

"Mario!" The evil minions said fearfully.

"Notice how they only say his name and not mine" Luigi whispered to Charlie Brown.

"So, Mario" Bowser Jr began, speaking in a manner befitting of a stereotypical Saturday morning cartoon villain. Probably had watched too many, that is if they had cartoons in this world "You've come to foil my heinous plan to raid the Toad village and scare the living daylight out of these innocent citizens, have you. Well, my heroic foe, I'll have you know I've prepared for your arrival. Minions! Attack!"

The Monty Mole hopped back into the tank, the turret of which it aimed at the Mario Brothers. The Hammer bros stopped terrorising the citizens and formed a circle around the heroes, along with a few more

Koopas with blue shells and helmets wielding boomerangs. And just to make things worse, a bunch of piranha plants popped up out of the various bushes planted around the square.

The non powered or heroic members of the group gulped, while the Mario Bros just looked determined and Charlie Brown looked, nervous, but also determined.

"Well what are you waiting for! Pound 'em!" Bowser Jr called, dropping the campy villain impression and returning to his regular high pitched growl.

The fight started with a bang, literally, as the tank fired two bullet bills in the heroes direction.

"Scatter!" Mario instructed. The Mario bros leapt in opposite directions, getting the bullet bills to follow them while the rest of the group separated to fight the rest of the minions.

A pair of hammer bros ran at Charlie Brown, who set up a shield for them to crash into. Unfortunately he set it up too soon and they had time to break to a halt, then throw their hammers over the barrier. Charlie Brown jumped back to avoid it, but was struck from behind by a boomerang from one of the blue shelled koopas, called Boomerang Bros incase you didn't know that. Yeah, really.

Charlie Brown got up and dodged another hammer from the Hammer Bros, only to be charge at by all three koopas. Charlie Brown lit up his hands and fired a large beam at the Bros, sending them flying and crashing into random houses. Charlie Brown smiled, but the smirk was wiped off his face as another hammer landed on his head. He turned around to find practically a whole army of Hammer Bros standing behind him. Charlie Brown gulped as the turtles began pelting him with their weapons, Charlie Brown's light shield just barely holding them off.

Sally and Yoshi meanwhile were doing a bit better. One of the Boomerang Bros threw it's boomerang at them, only for Yoshi to swallow the weapon and then swallow him. However, as with most koopas Yoshi couldn't digest him properly so spat him out, hitting another Boomerang Bro in the process and knocking them both out.

"Nice one Yoshi" Sally complimented the dinosaur, who blushed and waved his hand modestly. Their cutesy moment was cut short as a piranha plant shot out and tried to bite them, only to miss as Yoshi jumped up and landed on it's head, crushing the monstrous plant. Sally patted Yoshi's shoulder and pointed to the various other piranha plants looking hungrily at them. Yoshi puffed up his chest heroically and began spitting his tongue out at the plants, pulling them all forward to be swallowed. While he was doing this a Hammer Bro ran up from behind and leapt into the air, holding it's hammer high and ready to strike. Sally looked back to see the Hammer Bro descend upon them. Too late to react, all Sally could do was gasp as the koopa got ready to strike...

Just before the Hammer Bro could do any damage a rock was suddenly flung forward and struck him in the face, The Hammer Bro landed painfully right behind Yoshi and was struck on the head by it's own hammer. Sally looked over in the direction the rock had come from, to see Woodstock holding up a slingshot which Snoopy was using to fling

rocks at the Hammer and Boomerang Bros. Woodstock was having a bit of trouble holding the slingshot up while Snoopy was firing so rapidly, but they were hitting a lot of enemies.

Mario and Luigi meanwhile were dealing with the Monty Tank. They had managed to lead the bullet bills it was firing into a pair of Hammer Bros, and were now working on a way to take out the armoured vehicle. Of course, it wasn't a matter of defeating the tank, they just needed to take out the Monty Mole operating it. None of the koopas were authorised to use those kinds of tanks, and they probably wouldn't know how either, so no one else could use it if they beat the mole.

"Luigi, pass me that-a bag of-a power-ups!" Mario called to his younger brother, who pulled out said bag and slid it over in Mario's direction while leaping over another bullet bill from the tank. Mario took out a brown leaf with eyes, which when held tightly enough gave him the ears and tail of a raccoon.

After the brothers had exchanged glances and nods, mentally conversing their battle strategy, Mario used his suit's powers and flew high up into the air out of sight from the Monty tank... don't ask me how they work that way, they just do.

With Mario out of the way, the Monty tank paid it's full attention to Luigi, who was soon forced to dodge twelve bullets a minute. It didn't do much to stop him, he would just lead the bullet bills into each other or into the hammer bros that were also trying to attack him. As Luigi expertly dodged the bullets, Mario flew higher and higher, positioning his flight pattern so he was always directly above the Monty Tank. When at last he reached a suitable height Mario pulled out a coin and flicked it downwards. The coin fell at great speed right onto the tank, creating a resonating gong sound. The cockpit to the tank opened up as the Monty Mole came out to identify the source of the noise, while up above Mario ceased flying and performed a ground pound, rocketing himself downwards. The Monty Mole looked around and eventually turned his head upwards. When he saw Mario diving towards him the mole's eyes popped open in shock, but he was unable to do anything else before Mario landed on him with a great thud. Mario shook off the hard landing and looked down at the Monty Mole, squashed down to the size of a pancake, although his wriggling claws suggested he was still alive. Mario pulled the mole out of the tank and placed him down on a nearby bench, before using his raccoon suit-powered strength to effortlessly lift up the tank, spin it around and throw it into the distance.

Luigi walked up behind Mario as he was admiring his handiwork.

"Wow, nice-a shot" Luigi complimented.

"Thanks. You see, this is-a why this is my favourite power-up" Mario commented as he stroked his own tail. A fireball suddenly shot out from behind them and struck Mario in the back, causing Luigi to let out a girlish scream. Mario rolled five feet across the floor, there was a downbeat sound effect as his raccoon features vanished and he returned to his normal form. Mario looked up to see Bowser Jr glaring angrily.

"Grr, ruin my fun will ya! Well I'll fix you, you... you... plumber!" Bowser Jr yelled threateningly. Mario and Luigi weren't

threatened.

"Wow, is-a that really the best insult you can-a come up with?" Mario said in a deadpan voice. Bowser Jr spat another fireball at him, which Mario jumped over before assuming a battle stance "I-a got this one Luigi, you-a go and see to the townsfolk"

Luigi gave a respectful nod and ran off, as Mario and Bowser Jr stared each other down.

Meanwhile, let's take a look at how the other members of the group are doing. Sally and Yoshi are just finishing off the rest of the piranha plants, Snoopy and Woodstock are still hurling rocks at the Hammer Bros, and Sparky is merely watching the events unfold. After hearing a terrified shriek that didn't sound like it was coming from one of the spectating Toads, the spirit turned around to see a trio of Boomerang Bros quaking in their boots at the sight of him. Sparky raised a ghostly eyebrow, floating slightly towards them, making the turtles jump back in fright.

"It's a ghost! A big, scary, dead ghost!" The Boomerang Bro in the front yelped, shivering uncontrollably. Noticing their feat of him, a lightbulb went off in Sparky's head and he began making erratic and stereotypical ghostly movements.

"Ooooooooooh, I am the evil spirit of the scary dog man! I have come to feast on the souls of you three koopas, oooooooooohhhhhhhh!" Sparky said in his best impression of a scary ghosts voice. The three Boomerang bros screamed at the top of their lungs, their eyes almost popped out of their sockets in their terror, and then they ran off crying like little babies. Sparky watched them run with mild amusement.

"I cannot believe that worked" Sparky said to himself, chuckling "Well, guess it just goes to show you don't need a physical body or amazing powers to be useful in a fight. Ha, ha, ha-" Sparky's chuckles were interrupted as a light beam passed right through his chest, crashing against a lamppost. Sparky stared at said lamppost in confusion, looking back to find Charlie Brown pinned down by more than a dozen Hammer Brothers, with only one arm loose.

The Hammer Bros struggled to keep Charlie Brown under control, but Charlie Brown had had enough. Forming a thick aura of light around himself, Charlie Brown used his powers of flight to propel himself into the air, sending the Hammer Bros flying as he did so. Floating high above them, Charlie Brown panted briefly before blasting the still conscious Hammer Bros with light spheres until he was sure they were all unconscious.

Charlie Brown sighed and rubbed his aching neck. 'Ok, so I'm getting off to a bad start. No need to worry, right. It could be worse' He tried to tell himself. But being Charlie Brown, insecurity was already starting to set in. And when Charlie Brown feels insecure, bad things tended to happen to him.

Charlie Brown looked around, noticing that most of the Hammer or Boomerang Bros were either unconscious or retreating. Ok, so that was a good sigh. Now he just needed to find Bowser Jr. Charlie Brown flew around the square and eventually found the koopaling engaged in battle with Mario. Junior slashed at Mario several times with his claws. Mario swiftly dodged them all before jumping over Bowser Jr,

kicking him in the back of the head as he did so and sending him down. On the ground Bowser Jr threw a tantrum and sunk into his shell, before somehow propelling himself backwards at Mario, who dodged to the right and allowed Jr to crash through a bench and into a statue, stunning him for a moment and making him pop out of the shell. Mario ran for the koopa prince with his fist raised, Bowser Jr retaliated by shooting a fireball at him. Mario quickly back flipped to avoid it, only to have Bowser Jr leap up and punch him in the face, smashing Mario against the ground.

Seeing Mario in trouble, and mentally scolding himself for just watching up until now, Charlie Brown aimed carefully at Bowser Jr and channelled light into his palm. He pictured Lucy yelling at him to hit the target, and prepared to fire.

Only one problem, Bowser Jr and Mario were jumping around like crazy and he couldn't actually get a good shot. A few times Charlie Brown made to fire a light beam only to hold back when Mario jumped in the way of Jr. Sweat drops formed over Charlie Brown's brow, he decided to move closer to get a better shot. But then he saw Bowser Jr land a kick to Mario's stomach, before jumping up and preparing to slash down at him with his claws. In a moment of panic, Charlie Brown let loose a large light beam in the young koopa's direction. For a second it looked like the beam would reach its target, but at the last second Mario leapt backwards and was struck full force. With an audible scream, Mario was sent flying right over Bowser Jr and straight into a wall, which crumbled on top of him.

Charlie Brown's heart stopped for a moment. What had he done? Good God, what had he done? Forgetting everything else, Charlie Brown flew forward at full speed to check on his team mate. He found Mario partially buried under the rubble of the house. A slight ounce of relief coursed through him as he saw Mario was quite clearly alive and not even bleeding, but still clearly injured from that attack.

In a panic, Charlie Brown got on his knees and began shovelling the rubble off of Mario's body with his hands, pulling the plumber to safety. His face contorted with worry and guilt, Charlie Brown began checking for a pulse, as nearby Bowser Jr watched on with uncertainty before bursting out laughing.

"Ha ha, hey, thanks for the assist there pal! Ol' potato nose had it coming for a long time, ha, ha, ha!" Bowser Jr chortled in his grating childish voice. Charlie Brown, already overcome with grief over what he'd just done to Mario, could not help but grit his teeth and fly at Jr with the intent to punch his lights out. Bowser Jr just stood calmly, waiting for just the right moment to sidestep out of the way so that Charlie Brown, not really looking where he was going, ended up crashing face first into a tree, with so much force that the tree split in half. And of course the tree did not fall in the other direction, it came toppling right down on Charlie Brown, trapping him underneath it.

Not too far away, Luigi had been rounding up the Toads who had been watching the fight and leading them to a safe distance. He would have taken them away from the scene completely, but they all complained that they wanted to see the action, so the sidekick had to settle for corralling them all in an area at the edge of the Town Square that was secluded from the fighting and had a nice safe house they could

all go into in case things got too out of hand. When he believed he'd gotten everyone to safety Luigi looked around for any sign of his brother. He eventually spotted Bowser Jr atop the tree Charlie Brown was caught under, doing a sort of victory dance as Mario groaned on the floor nearby.

"Oh boy, not good" Luigi said aloud, turning to address the Toads
"Ok, this is everyone right?"

"I can't find my son!" One female Toad cried out in a panic. A young Toad wandered up behind her, tugging on her shirt.

"I'm right here mom" The kid said. The mother Toad looked down and gave him a big hug.

"Oh, thank goodness!" The woman cried euphorically. After a minute of squeezing the life out of her son, she turned back to Luigi and said
"Ok, now I think everyone's here"

"Well good. In that case I'm-a just gonna go bail my friends and brother out, if you come under attack just-a give me a shout" He told the crowd before running off to save the day.

Bowser Jr danced around and laughed at the top of his voice, beneath him Charlie Brown struggled to pull himself free, only to find his strength fading from him and his aura of light growing dim.

"Ha ha, yes, VICTORY. At last the koopas are victorious! Mario is beaten, and I beat him! Oh, daddy's going to be so happy!" Junior cheered.

"More like disappointed"

Bowser Jr blinked and turned around, finding Luigi standing right behind him. The younger Mario brother waved at him in a friendly manner before poking Bowser Jr in the eyes. Junior yelped and covered his eyes, while Luigi held his fist back and punched the koopaling in the stomach as hard as he could. Bowser Jr stumbled backwards and fell off the tree, landing right next to Charlie Brown's head. Junior hadn't been hurt that bad thanks to his tough shell, but he was still very annoyed.

"Grr, you'll pay for that green 'stache!" Junior yelled, spitting a fireball up at Luigi, who jumped into the air, avoiding the attack before bouncing off Bowser Jr's head. The baby koopa rubbed his head and then growled, getting into his shell and propelling himself after Luigi. Seeing the oncoming shell, Luigi ran away from it as fast as he could. Despite his Olympic level speed, Bowser Jr slowly caught up with him and soon was mere inches away from making impact. That was when Luigi decided to backflip over him, causing Bowser Jr to crash into the statue in the middle of the square. The sound of the impact resonated around the village, Bowser Jr popped out of his shell soon after looking dazed.

Charlie Brown had been so busy watching Luigi and Junior that he had almost forgotten he was trapped under a tree. He was reminded when he tried to get up and join the plumber only to fail because he was still stuck. Mario on the other hand had no trouble getting to his feet as he recovered, spotting his brother approach the dazed koopa kid.

Stars still circled Bowser Jr's head as Luigi approached him. Luigi hung around for a moment until Bowser Jr came back to his senses and then asked "So, ready to call it a day kid?"

Bowser Jr stared at him for a moment before roaring "Never!" And spitting a fireball at Luigi's head. The hero ducked to avoid it, but was then struck by an upper cut from Junior, sending him falling on his back. Bowser Jr stepped on Luigi's feet to hold him still while he formed another large fireball in his mouth. He was ready to burn Luigi's face off, when suddenly he was yanked from behind, causing him to swallow the fireball instead. Turning his head, Junior saw Mario grabbing hold of his tail and proceeding to tug with all his strength. Bowser Jr was pulled off of Luigi and off his feet, Mario then proceeded to spin the young Koopa around rapidly. Seeing what his brother was doing, Luigi got up and ran back a few yards, waving to Mario. Seeing the indication, Mario released his grip on Junior and sent him flying towards Luigi, who started running before giving Junior a jump kick to the face, the force of which sent him spinning through the air and crashing through the tree, freeing Charlie Brown in the process.

Bowser Jr rolled spinning across the square, coming to a stop besides the village gates where the last remaining Hammer Bros had retreated to. One of the Hammer Brothers stooped down and poked the side of Junior's face to determine if he was still conscious. Bowser Jr opened his eyes and looked groggily at the minion.

"Um, your highness, now might be a good time to retreat" The Hammer Bro told him. If he had been talking to Bowser himself he might have been scolded for suggesting that, but Junior was somewhat more reasonable.

"Yeah, good thinking. I've had my fun, let's get out while the going's good" Bowser Jr declared. The Hammer Brothers took this as their cue to run off, leaving their prince to find his feet on his own. Nearby Mario and Luigi ran to confront him, Bowser Jr just glared at them and shook his fist, declaring "I'll get you guys next time!" Before running off after his minions. Mario and Luigi stopped by the gates to watch the little brat retreat, both sighed in relief.

"Well, another day saved" Mario said cheerfully.

"Yeah" Luigi nodded in equal mirth.

Charlie Brown walked up to the duo from behind, his healing ability was in full effect easing the wounds he'd sustained during the fight, though he still looked battered. Something Sally took notice of as she, Yoshi, Snoopy and Woodstock re-joined the rest of the group.

"Yikes, are you alright big brother?" Sally asked. Charlie Brown sighed.

"I'll be fine Sally" Charlie Brown told her half heartedly, though that was still enough to comfort her. Mario and Luigi turned around to greet the rest gang, and Sparky quickly re-joined them.

"Well, that was a spectacle. Luckily it seems none of the civilians

were harmed during the raid. There's a fair bit of property damage, but I hear Toad's are experts at rebuilding things, so it shouldn't be a problem. Good work everyone, you all did well" Sparky congratulated the heroes. Charlie Brown was the only one not listening to him, instead looking at Mario in concern.

"I'm really, really sorry I hit you like that, I-" Charlie Brown began, but Mario, seeing he was about to go into a long guilty rant, held up his hand to silence Charlie Brown.

"Don't-a worry about it Charlie Brown, everything's fine. Accidents happen, it didn't-a hurt too badly. I mean, it hurt, but I have a high pain tolerance. Just don't worry about it, ok" Mario said in a kind tone, which only slightly worked to ease Charlie Brown's concern.

* * *

><p>After everyone had had a moment to calm down and catch up with one another, the group decided to go check on the situation in the village. As they walked down the main path of the village, the heroes found themselves greeted by many a gracious Toad, all loudly thanking them for chasing Bowser Jr. away. Charlie Brown, though still feeling guilty about his botched efforts during the fight, nevertheless began to beam brightly as he waved to everyone. Snoopy kissed a few people's hands while Sally rode atop Yoshi, waving to the Toads with her hand in the air as if she were a visiting princess. Mario & Luigi, who were used to this kind of praise, just waved back to the crowd and smiled.<p>

"Woow...so this is what being a hero feels like?" Charlie Brown said as he waved to the happy Toads. "I've never been congratulated for anything in my life. This is...different."

Luigi waved and answered Charlie Brown, "Oooh yeah. This is the life heroes lead, Charlie Brown. Beating evil, shaking hands, and kissing babies. Every day holds something new and evil...but it's always the same at the end. I don't-a mind though. It-a gives me a sense of accomplishment. The people love their heroes here, and they always expect us when the chips are down. And it's-a your duty to give them what they ask for. Reliability is key for being a hero. You can't-a let them down, Charlie Brown."

Charlie Brown immediately put his hand down, and his expression fell once more. The near-bald kid looked down and blinked twice, then put on a frown. A rush of guilt and pessimistic feelings began to overflow his mind. If what Luigi said about being a hero was true, then he was already a failure.

Sally looked around and saw a clothes shop in the village to her right. She directed Yoshi to it and entered into the store, hoping to maybe find a new pretty dress. She stepped down from Yoshi and made her way through the store's inventory. But...then she began to frown as she dug through the store's selections. In typical Sally fashion, she stomped her way to the clerk's desk and began to demand an explanation.

"I thought this was a clothes' store." She said in a loud tone. The clerk, a Toad with an orange spotted cap, was taken aback by her bravado.

"Well, it is ma'am." The Toad said, politely "Peruse around and pick what you like!"

Sally sneered, "Oh, SURE! I'll pick through your varying degree of clothes! I sure do love MUSHROOM HAT NUMBER EIGHT! And BLUE VEST NUMBER NINETEEN looks flattering! WHITE PANTS NUMBER THIRTY-EIGHT is beautiful! And I better get BROWN SHOES NUMBER SIXTY-SIX before they're gone! Those are one of a kind!...WHAT KIND OF SHANGHAI OPERATION ARE YOU RUNNING HERE?" Sally screamed, causing the poor Toad to flip over in the air and land on his backside.

He got up and tried to calm Sally down, "Ma'am, ma'am, I don't even know what you mean! What's wrong with our selection? These are all the latest Toad fashion trends!"

"THIS IS NOT FASHION! IT'S A TRICK! I WAS ALMOST TRICKED! THE PRETTY ADVERTISING AND LIGHTS CAN DRAW ANY UNSUSPECTING GIRL INTO HERE AND GET BAMBOOZLED! I AM NOT HERE TO-"

Yoshi used his head to push Sally out of the door, hoping to end her tirade in the building. Sally looks back at the store, then back at Yoshi. "Good thinking, Yoshi. We should take this to the streets and let the people know!"

The green dinosaur sighed and allowed Sally onto his back before walking down the street to rejoin the group.

Woodstock, flying in loop-de-loops, began pointing to the inside of his mouth, signifying his hunger. Snoopy's stomach rumbled as well, and the beagle was just reminded of the fact...

...that he missed lunch.

This fact, as it dawned on Snoopy, caused the beagle's eyes to grow bloodshot. His fur grew wilder and his breaths drew shorter. He ran towards his master and began to wildly throttle him while letting out spastic yelps. Charlie Brown fell onto the ground once Snoopy dropped him and observed his dog's theatrics. Mario and Luigi were somewhat disturbed by Snoopy's lack of decorum in public...

...but darnit, this was LUNCH we're talking about!

Snoopy began to grow faint, and his knees trembled. He let out cries of anguish and despair, and pointed to his stomach as his final act before passing out over Charlie Brown's stomach. The Mario Bros. looked over at Charlie Brown, their eyebrows raised and their... curiosities... peaked.

"Err, What was that?" Mario asked, perplexed by the entire scene. "Was-a Snoopy have a seizure?"

"No..." Charlie Brown looked up into the air and mentally groaned before picking his dog up. "...He missed lunch. Where's the nearest food place?"

A Toad with a map tapped Charlie Brown on the shoulder from behind. The hero of light turned around and looked down at the Toad. The nice villager pointed in the direction of the village diner and grinned happily. Sparky chuckled as he floated up from behind Charlie Brown.

"Well, that was good fortune. Let's all go get something to eat before we head back onto the road. It'll do you all good to fill up..." Sparky looked over at Snoopy, who groaned in "agony". "Some more than others..." the spirit deadpanned.

The group entered the diner and grabbed a couple of tables to eat at. They all ordered and spent a few minutes inside the diner, eating, conversing, and sharing stories. Snoopy, now full, hopped out of his seat and grabbed Woodstock. Snoopy eyed the bag of power-ups Mario had at his side and grabbed them while no one was looking. He then ran into the bathroom with them with a slow flying Woodstock in tow.

Meanwhile Mario, while laughing with the group, noticed Charlie Brown sitting at another table by himself. He had barely touched his sandwich and wouldn't even bother lifting his head and looking up. Mario raised an eyebrow and left the group to go talk to Charlie Brown.

Charlie picked at his sandwich, not even attempting to eat it. Mario sat down at his table, startling the boy. "What's-a the matter, kid? You didn't even-a take a bite out of your sandwich. A growing hero like you needs your food. What's wrong?"

Charlie Brown sighed... and looked up at Mario... then looked back down. He continued to poke and stare at it as he answered Mario. "...I screwed up out there against Bowser Jr."

"Oh, that? Oh don't-a worry about that, kid! You don't-a always win 'em on the first few goes! Me and-a Luigi screwed up loads of times fighting evil in our first battles with Bowser. It's hard doing something you're new at. Just have to train to get better" Mario smiled at Charlie Brown, who looked up and sighed before looking down.

"Yeah, well, I almost screwed it up for everybody. Bowser Jr. almost won because I accidently hit you, with how strong my light beams are I could've seriously hurt you. I was the weak link. And that's not even the biggest mistake I've made, I've let all of my friends be captured and scattered across the universe and I couldn't even do anything to stop Bowser making off with Peppermint Patty and your princess. If I'm as powerful as Sparky says I am, I should have been able to prevent all of those things easily, but as usual I just screwed it up" Charlie Brown put his hands on his cheeks and continued to look at his sandwich. "I'm not reliable like Luigi said heroes should be. Sparky keeps saying I'm the best choice for this job, and for a minute after I first beat Joe I even started to believe him. But after all this, I just don't know any more. Trusting ME with saving the worlds isn't a very wise thing...*Sighs*, I can already see Lucy now... along with Violet and Patty... laughing and berating me on my screw-up... what a hero I am..." Charlie Brown sighed. Mario just looked on and couldn't help but feel sorry for the kid. This was worse than he had described it earlier.

"I can-a tell that you weren't-a very well received back where you come from..." Mario said. "Somebody always there to criticize and put you down?"

Charlie Brown sighed..."You don't know the half of it...I can see them all here, telling me how much of a screw-up I am..."

"Well they aren't-a here, Charlie Brown. You can-a prove them wrong right now!" Mario said, giving CB a firm voice to listen to, "You can-a either sit here and sulk and-a prove them right...or get up and-a be the best darn hero you can ever be! Why not try and be a hero? We rely on you to help out and beat these evil powers that-a be! Heroes never start out as true blue-a heroes! They grow into their role! And Charlie Brown...I just know you'll-a grow into the role. I bet a plate of-a spaghetti and my mama's famous three cheese lasagna on it!"

Mario's pep talk gave Charlie Brown a bit of hope, as it caused him to produce a tiny smile. The boy looked up at Mario and sighed, then picked up his sandwich. He took a bite out of it for the first time since he bought it, and talked after swallowing. "Thanks Mario...I needed a small pep talk. I have low-confidence episodes sometimes. Comes with being me. I want to be able to help...and with you encouraging me, hopefully I can reach that goal."

Mario gave Charlie Brown a reassuring pat on the shoulder, "No-a problem, son. I just know you'll be a full-fledged hero soon. Trust-a me." He gave CB a wink and then began to talk more to the young boy, just to keep him company.

In the bathroom, Snoopy and Woodstock began playing around in the power-ups bag. The two animals knew they prooobably shouldn't be doing this...but the fun that could be had couldn't be ignored. Besides, when else could they do this?

Snoopy picked up a blue shell and activated it, turning into Blue Shell Snoopy. He smiled happily and ran at a wall. He retreated into his shell and spun right through the wall, landing into the kitchen. He bounced around the room, going unnoticed by the Toad chefs working inside, and grabbed a sandwich (free of charge of course). He bounced back into the bathroom and began to slow down his spinning and bouncing. He came to a halt back to his original spot and exited from his shell. The beagle looked at the sandwich he collected and began to take a bite out of it, satiating his hunger from the exciting bouncing.

Woodstock was next, digging through the bag and collecting a yellow square with an exclamation point. He stumbled around with it, but managed to throw it into the air. Woodstock flew up and pounded the block, which turned him into a metal version of himself. Amazed at his new form, Woodstock tried to fly, but could barely get himself a half a millimeter off the ground. The metal bird fell, creating a shockwave that sent Snoopy falling over. Woodstock had gotten himself stuck in the ground after falling and struggled to pop out. Snoopy got up and began trying to pull the heavy metal Woodstock out of the hole. The power-up wore off, however, and Woodstock easily popped out and flew over a stall and into a toilet. The wet bird walked under the stall door and stood there, soaking wet. Snoopy snickered sheepishly and dug into the bag once more. Woodstock used paper towels to dry himself...but soon began to feel a warm heat over him that started to dry him quicker. Woodstock sighed and relaxed in the heat. The warm bird calmly looked up...

...TO SEE A STREAM OF FIRE OVER HIS HEAD!

"IIIP!" He screeched as he stared up into the fire filled air!_

"iiiiiiiiiiiiiiii! iiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!"_ He continuously chirped, but when he turned around he saw Snoopy, with red ears, blowing flames at him to help dry him off. After getting completely dry, Woodstock flew up and loop-de-looped right back into the bag. Snoopy, meanwhile, took a liking to the powers from the Fire Flower. He grinned devilishly and blew fire at the ceiling, melting a giant hole in it. He observed his work, and looked on with admiration and awe. Woodstock then popped back out of the bag and began to struggle lifting something. Snoopy was perplexed as to what Woodstock was about to pick up...but was amazed when he saw him raise up a giant mushroom with a yellow cap with red polka-dots.

Outside, Luigi laughed and talked with the group, and then reached down to pick up the bag of power-ups. He then realized that the bag wasn't there.

"Uuuh, where's-a the bag?" He said, moving his hand around under the table. "Uuum...a-Mario...where's the bag?" He asked across the room to his brother, who turned around. Mario gave Luigi a discerning look and shook his head.

"Oh-a Luigi! You-a lost the bag? I told you to keep up with it!" He scolded his younger brother.

Luigi shrugged and defended himself, "I-a never lost it! I brought it in here and put it under the table! Somebody must-a took it!"

"Well who did then?" Mario replied back, tapping his chin thoughtfully.

Suddenly, a large "CRASH!" could be heard. The entire diner was rocked by a large rumbling that came from the bathroom. The heroes all got up and ran outside...

...to find a GIANT Woodstock with a fireblazing Snoopy on his head. The now giant canary began to fly and took off from the restaurant. Snoopy laughed and yucked it up on Woodstock's head, but then lost his balance and fell...right into his mouth! Snoopy was somewhat disturbed and disgusted by the change of scenery, and began to heat up Woodstock's insides to get him to open up. Not able to stand the intense heat from his mouth, the loudly screeching Woodstock opened his burning mouth. With the fire blazing out of the bird's mouth and onto the village, mixed in with his own giant size and loud screeching, Woodstock seemed like a giant, yellow, firebreathing dragon to the Toads. They all ran in fear, trying to avoid the "Yellow Dragon of Doom".

"THE PROPHECIEEEES! THEY WERE REEEAL!" Screamed out one old and crazy Toad, who jumped over a bridge and into the water.

The heroes and Sally & Yoshi all stared wide-eyed at this scene unfold before them. As Woodstock flew out of the village, the heroes just stared at the destruction that was caused all around them. Sparky looked over into the restaurant, which was now roofless, and raised his hand to get the waitress Toad's attention. With a loud and calm (yet trembling) voice, he said-

"Check please."

* * *

><p>(Half an hour and much explaining later)<p>

The heroes were just leaving the village and looking around the grasslands for any sign of Snoopy and Woodstock. After a lengthy search for the duo, Sparky eventually spotted them behind a bush. Woodstock had luckily returned to his normal tiny size, though Snoopy still retained his fire-Snoopy form, and was using his powers to juggle fireballs for his and Woodstock's amusement. Sparky flew back to the group and led them to the duo. At first Snoopy looked glad to see his friends again, but then he realized they were all glaring at him. Snoopy dispersed the fireballs and looked at the floor regretfully, as did Woodstock. Charlie Brown sighed.

"You're a lot of trouble sometimes, you know that" Charlie Brown told his dog.

"One million coins. ONE MILLION COINS. That's how much the damage will cost that you did to the restaurant and the rest of the village, how are we supposed to pay for that?!" Sally complained.

"Don't-a worry, Mario and I have-a collected a fortune in coins in all-a the years we've-a been fighting evil. Should only-a half empty our accounts" Luigi replied, somewhat dejectedly.

"It doesn't-a matter, it's only solid gold coins. There's-a millions more floating around where-a those came from. We can all be mad at Snoopy later, we're-a not that-a far from the castle" Mario explained.

"Really?" Charlie Brown asked, earning a nod.

"Yep, it's-a just half a mile down the road, we'll-a be there in no-a time" Luigi said eagerly. This did get the groups spirits up.

"Alright then, let's get there quickly while we still have a chance to save our friends" Charlie Brown said, leading the rest of the group away. Snoopy and Woodstock gladly followed, relieved their punishments were being delayed. At least they were until Charlie Brown turned around and said "And don't think we're going to forget about what you two did. I'm taking away your tv privileges for the next three weeks"

Snoopy stopped and began to spasm nervously, letting out an anguished howl as Woodstock began to cry.

As the heroes marched on, mere minutes away from their destination, a figure watched them from above. Riding his broom, Kamek observed the heroes every movement, as he had done since they had exited the underground. A devilish smile spread across his face as he sped off ahead of them.

Moments later, Charlie Brown caught sight of a hill where a small stone castle stood. Not nearly as grand as the Mushroom Castle, but still more impressive and charming than most buildings. But it wasn't even that which excited him. No, that was the enormous shit docked at the other side of the castle.

"Hmm... yep, that's-a Bowser's Doomship alright" Mario said

confidently.

"Well, looks like we did-a make it on time. Good, good" Luigi said calmly. Then erratically he yelled "Now come on! We gotta hurry up and get-a there before they take off! Move, move, move!"

At Luigi's insistence the group ran at full speed towards the hill, marching up the hill towards the castle gate. As they were running, Mario began to take notice of something. There were no minions blocking their path thus far, and there didn't seem to be any up ahead. Now that was discouraging. Under normal circumstances Bowser would have any castle he was occupying surrounded with guards, there'd be goombas, koopas, wigglers, fire snakes, blorgs, lakitu's and all sorts. But no, so far none.

Mario skidded to a stop. It took the others a full ten seconds to realize he was no longer keeping up with them and rejoin him.

"Hey Mario, what's up?" Luigi asked, confused by his brothers actions. Mario just looked around carefully and hummed.

"Surely you all-a notice the stunning lack of enemies around here?" He informed them. Everyone looked around to see that he was right.

"Yeah, so?" Sally asked, not quite getting the point.

"So, why would Bowser not want to have guards patrolling the area incase we attacked" Sparky answered for Mario, looking thoughtful "I'm going to guess that he has something more sinister in store for us in the castle"

"So it's a trap?" Charlie Brown asked. Sparky nodded, and Luigi sighed.

"So wait, if it's a trap then what do we do? It would be stupid to just charge in now, and how else are we going to get to Peppermint Patty and the Princess" Sally said in a grumpy voice.

"It's-a probably nothing we can't-a handle anyway. Bowser's traps usually just involve setting us up against some sort of-a giant monster or-a making us go through some maze filled with-a booby traps or something, let's-a just keep moving" Luigi said nonchalantly, continuing to walk up to the castle. Mario was not quite so confident.

"I-a don't know Luigi, some of his last plans have-a been getting progressively smarter. This could be trouble" Mario said cautiously, but Luigi just shrugged.

"It's-a Bowser, he's never been good at-a stopping us. It'll be fine" Luigi said calmly.

Mario shook his head, but eventually warmed up to Luigi's suggestion.

"I suppose-a you're right. But still, I got a funny feeling about this" Mario said, slowly following after his brother.

The rest of the group had their doubts, Charlie Brown in particular.

But when he thought that Peppermint Patty was probably inside, and that trap or not this was his best chance to save her before he screwed things up any more, he decided that it didn't matter what sort of mess they got themselves into. He promised he'd save his friend, and that was just what he was going to do.

Another minute of hiking and the heroes reached the enormous wooden doors to the castle. Mario pushed open the left door and poked his head inside for a quick look around. Finding nothing too out of the ordinary, he pulled his head back and motioned everyone inside, but warned them all to watch out for anything suspicious and keep their guard up at all times. As everyone else entered the castle however, Yoshi jumped back before Sally could usher him in. She looked down at Yoshi's face, the poor dinosaur looked absolutely terrified.

"Oh yeah, Yoshi doesn't-a like going into castles under koopa control. Scared 'cause we-a usually run into ghosts in these-a sort of places" Luigi said. After glancing over his shoulder and thinking about it for a moment he shivered "Makes me kinda wish I'd-a brought along my-a Poltergust 5000. But hey, too late now"

Charlie Brown noticed that while Luigi managed to fake a confident facial expression, his legs were trembling. Actually, he might have been trembling aswell at the thought of encountering ghosts, but the fact that he'd been hanging around with a talking spirit dog for the past two days had him feeling surprisingly calm about it.

Sally took another look at Yoshi's nervous face and patted the top of his head. "It's ok Yoshi, you don't have to go inside if you don't want to" She told him soothingly.

"As it were, it's probably best Sally and Yoshi do remain outside, as well as Snoopy and Woodstock. Whether Bowser's traps tend to be effective or not, it would be reckless to put them in harms way" Sparky said to the leading members of the team, Mario and Charlie Brown, who both nodded.

"That sounds reasonable" Charlie Brown said, turning to his sister "You sure you can keep Snoopy under control for a few minutes?" Sally casually waved her hand.

"Pfft, please. He's just one beagle. And if he tries wandering off, I can always have Yoshi swallow him and spit him back up. That would teach him a lesson" Sally said thoughtfully. Snoopy shivered at the look in her eye.

"I gotta be careful not to get on her bad side when she's riding that dinosaur. Woodstock, make a note of that" Snoopy said, Woodstock immediately pulled out his small typewriter.

"Well, I still got a funny feeling about-a this, but we're probably running out of-a time. So, here we go" Mario said, stepping through the doors and into the castle. After a last glance at his sister and pet, Charlie Brown followed. Sparky floated in after him, Luigi prepared to follow when Charlie Brown suddenly closed the door behind him, causing Luigi to bump face first into the door and fall on his backside, holding his nose. Hearing the bump from the other side, Charlie Brown opened the door back up again and helped Luigi up.

"Sorry, sorry, I thought you'd already gone in" Charlie Brown apologised meekly, Luigi just told him not to worry about it and continued inside.

Clearly this castle must have been home to Toads at some point, for the entrance hall hosted a large number of statues and silk tapestries of the mushroom people. Two stone statues of Toad knights stood at either side of the entrance, and there were at least twenty paintings covering the walls featuring Toads in various different landscapes and clothing, though all sporting the traditional hat. The floors were white and bare, apart from a fine red carpet that lead from the doors up a large marble staircase, which lead to a landing with a single door. Charlie Brown remembered something Mario had said about abandoned castles, if this castle had been abandoned for a time it hardly showed it. The hall was in remarkable shape, you couldn't tell that nobody lived here.

"So, does anybody live here now?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Why, you-a thinking of moving in?" Luigi asked jokingly.

"Well, no, I'm just wondering if Bowser might have captured anyone who was living here and we should rescue them too" Charlie Brown replied.

"You don't-a have to worry about that. This here's one of the castles Bowser captures most-a frequently during his kidnapping plots. The Toads that lived here abandoned it years ago when they realized how-a dangerous it was to-a live here. Though I think they-a sometimes use it for parties and religious banquets" Mario explained, taking a few steps forward and looking around. He let out a loud hmmm. "Ok, now I know he's-a up to something. No guards patrolling outside-a the castle is one thing, but no-one watching the entrance? I'm starting to wonder if we should-a just go around the castle and see if we can-a just have you fly us onto the doomship, Charlie Brown"

"Hey, that's-a not a bad idea. Why didn't I think of that?" Luigi slapped himself, walking back to the doors "If-a we know it's a trap, no sense just-a walking into it, even if Bowser's traps are always ill conceived" Luigi grabbed the handle to the doors and pulled. Nothing happened. Luigi's eyebrows rose in confusion as he pulled again. Door didn't budge. Luigi tried yanking the door handle and pulling with all his might, succeeding at nothing but pulling a joint in his arm. He let out a loud yelp, let go of the handle and turned to his teammates while nursing his arm "Well, that's just great. The doors are locked"

"Um, Luigi, you have to-a push the doors to open them from the inside" Mario said, giving his brother an odd look. Luigi smiled meekly.

"Oh. Heh heh. My mistake" Luigi said, turning around and confidently pushing the door. It didn't budge. Luigi stared incredulously at the doors and began shoving as hard as he could, to no effect. After ten seconds Luigi gave up and shrugged at his brother "Ok, now it's locked for real"

"It can't be locked, it was open when we-a came in" Mario said, walking up to the door and giving it a push himself, along with Charlie Brown. Sparky watched them try in vain to open the door and

offered his suggestion.

"I'm guessing they're enchanted to lock once we entered. Seems our only option is to go deeper into the castle" Sparky said. Mario shrugged indifferently before walking over to the staircase.

"Well, never mind then. Come on gang, let's-a go see what old scale face has-a in store for us" Mario said in a conversational tone. Charlie Brown, Luigi and Sparky followed.

"You know, if this is a trap then shouldn't we be a bit more worried?" Charlie Brown asked the green-clad plumber.

"I can't-a speak for the rest of you, but I'm-a plenty worried. Of course, I worry about everything. Literally everything. I worry about-a stepping outside the door and wandering the streets at night. I'm-a scared of practically everything that moves, I can't-a remember a time I wasn't worried to tell you the truth" Luigi replied sincerely. Charlie Brown blinked in surprise.

"Then how aren't you a nervous wreck?" Charlie Brown asked. Luigi chuckled.

"For a time I was. But I've-a just learned to live with it. That and-a being severely under appreciated. I'm-a coward, and everyone knows it, but I've-a seen and done so much over the years, fear just-a doesn't have as much of an affect on me as it-a used to. Sure, there are times when I-a freak out and lose it, but generally I've learned to face my fear and do my best to-a help out. That's another part of-a being a hero kid, no matter how hard or daunting a task you're-a faced with, you'll do it, no matter if you're afraid" Luigi explained matter-of-factly. He gave Charlie Brown a knowing look and added "The same thing applies to doubts and other insecurities, Charlie Brown"

Charlie Brown stopped for a moment to think about that. He felt a sudden burst of respect for Luigi's ability to put his fears aside to do good. Could he really do the same thing about his self-doubt?

Noticing the others were all at the top of the staircase by now and he was still at the bottom Charlie Brown shook these thoughts aside and ran up the stairs. When he had rejoined the group Mario carefully opened the door and lead the four of them through. The heroes found themselves in another large hall, slightly bigger and much darker than the last one with three more doors, one at the other end of the room, and one each to the far right and left. Doors, might I add, that were obscured by walls of dark mist.

"What the what?" Mario said, noticing the oddity. There was a sudden whooshing sound behind the group, and everyone turned to find the door that they just came through was also blocked off by the same dark mist.

"Well, you were right Mario, it was a trap" Charlie Brown pointed out the obvious.

The heroes looked to the centre of the room, where three objects suddenly fell from the sky and became embedded in the ground. Closer inspection revealed them to be what looked like blunt swords, with

several dents that made the top halves of the swords (The ones facing down) look like three conjoined scallops. The heroes gave these unconventionally shaped blades strange looks, but they were all taken aback as three rings of dark purple fire formed around the weapons. The rings moved in a clockwise motion before suddenly closing in on themselves, then forming into the figures of three monstrous black creatures. Creatures sporting tails, purple horns, wings growing out of their elbows, and heart shaped holes in their chests. The beings, whatever they were, bared a passing resemblance to what devils might look like.

The heroes were in awe at the mysterious beings, Mario and Luigi especially since they were something the duo had genuinely never seen before in all their travels. But none were more concerned than Sparky, who's eyes were wide with fear and sudden realization.

"What are they?" Charlie Brown asked the Mario brothers, thinking they would be the most likely to know. But they couldn't answer, instead Sparky informed everyone.

"They are Invisibles, an uncommon variety of Heartless" Charlie Brown gaped at the dog spirit.

"Heartless?!" Charlie Brown yelped. Sparky nodded.

"Um, those shadowy things you said work for the Dark Witch?" Mario asked, eyeing the very visible Invisibles with some curiosity.

"Indeed. Seems my sister has made a few alliances while of her own while we've kept busy" Sparky said gravely. The three heartless picked up their swords and stared unblinkingly at Charlie Brown and the Mario Brothers. The heroes got into their battle positions and prepared for a fight, the Invisibles tossed their weapons into the air, caught them, and lunged forward to attack.

* * *

><p>Back outside the castle, Sally and Yoshi stood by calmly. Snoopy and Woodstock had acquired a ball from somewhere and were playing a game of catch, though every time Woodstock made to catch the ball he would just get squashed into the ground.<p>

'Snoopy needs to think of some new games that don't have a detrimental effect on Woodstocks health' Sally thought to herself 'Wow, I almost sounded like my sweet baboo with that last part. He's always saying smart and wise things, it's so cute' Sally's face lit up as she began fantasising romantic thought about her beloved Linus... her face dropped into a sad frown as she remembered the predicament he was in.

'Oh Linus, I hope we find you soon' Sally thought wistfully. Following up from this thought, she turned to the castle door and yelled "Hurry up big brother! My sweet baboo's still waiting for me to rescue him!"

Yoshi, who had just been gazing at a passing butterfly, jumped a bit at Sally's exclamation. He shook his head and looked around for where the butterfly now was. While looking he was something heading his way. Something green and glowing and moving very fast...

"Yoshi!" Yoshi leapt back at just the right moment to avoid the magic blast, which instead left a burning mark into the castle wall. Yoshi's sudden movement and the sight of the attack brought Sally out of her daydreaming state, as well as grabbing the attention of Snoopy and Woodstock.

The sidekicks looked in the direction of the blast, to see Kamek floating over them on his broom. The old magikoopa was clutching his glowing wand and staring intently at Yoshi.

"So, we meet again my old foe" Kamek said. Yoshi frowned at the wizard, while Sally just looked around as though expecting to see someone.

"Um, are you talking to me?" Sally asked. Kamek looked at her and raised an eyebrow... or, a wrinkle that was in the area his eyebrow would be if he had any.

"Um, no, I was referring to the Yoshi" Kamek answered awkwardly. Sally looked down at Yoshi and noticed the glare he was giving the magikoopa.

"I didn't know you had your own enemies Yoshi" Sally said.

"Yoshi!" Yoshi told Kamek in a stern voice. Kamek grinned sinisterly.

"Still as incomprehensible as ever I see. Well, no matter, I didn't come here to share stories over cups of coffee. I'm here to kill you all" Kamek announced. Sally blinked a few times before recognising Kamek's obvious turtle features.

"You're one of those koopas, aren't you!" Sally shouted in an accusing tone. Kamek chuckled.

"Little girl, I am the court wizard of the Koopa empire, commander of the magikoopas and his nastiness Bowser's right hand man. And as the koopa king's most loyal servant, I've been granted the task of disposing of his enemies before they intercept him. I had a very simple but brilliant plan you see, first I would create an illusion of our Doomship on the other side of this castle, leading you straight here. Then, once you meddling heroes were inside, you would be set upon by those dark creatures our new benefactor lent us" Kamek explained. Sally gasped and growled at him.

"So it was a trap! How dare you trap my brother, if he gets hurt I'm going to slug you!" Sally shook her fist threateningly. Kamek chuckled.

"Yes, good luck "Slugging" me from up here, child. Anyway, I'm glad you and the mongrels were left out here. I've got a score with that dinosaur you're riding that I've been meaning to settle for a good few years now" Kamek said wickedly. Snoopy and Woodstock growled and tweeted indignantly at his mongrel comment, while Yoshi raised his fists and looked ready to fight. Sally gave Kamek an arrogant look.

"Well, you're about to have another score to settle, because we're gonna kick your butt!" Sally declared.

"Oh, is that so?" Kamek said with a grin. From out of the sky a troop of Shy Guys swooped down and surrounded Snoopy and Woodstock. The animals jumped in fright at their sudden appearance before Snoopy took on a fighting stance, Woodstock merely hiding behind him.

Yoshi, seeing his new friends in danger, prepared to come to their aid before Kamek shot another magic blast at him, forcing him to leap back. Kamek fired another blast at Yoshi, then another, then another, until Yoshi was a good distance away from Snoopy, Woodstock and the shy guys, at which point Kamek floated down off his broom and blocked Sally and Yoshi's path. Kamek held his wand forward and glowered at Yoshi, who shot back a determined look as he got ready to fight.

"Go get 'im Yoshi. No Mercy!" Sally yelled.

"Yoshi!" Yoshi declared as he ran forward, and Kamek prepared to strike.

* * *

><p>Back inside the castle, the battle between Charlie Brown, the Mario Brothers and the Invisibles was heating up. Appropriately, the heroes took to fighting one heartless each, taking their battles to different corners of the room. The Invisibles quickly proved themselves worthy foes, they were quick and swift, and as Charlie Brown found out their blades, while seemingly not sharp enough to cut anything, still hurt like heck if they managed to strike you with them.<p>

Mario caught his opponent off balanced and bounded forward. A moment before he could reach it, the Invisible regained it's momentum and swung it's sword at him. It would have taken the plumbers head clean off if Mario hadn't ducked backwards and proceeded to pounce at the Invisible, punching it right in the chest and sending it flying. The Invisible caught itself in mid air right before it hit the wall and flew at Mario, who jumped up and landed a hard downwards kick to the monsters back, stomping it onto the floor.

"I don't-a see why you're-a so worried about these-a monsters, Sparky. They're not-a so tough" Mario called to the spirit Guardian, who was spectating from the corner of the room.

"Pay attention or you'll soon find yourself corrected" Sparky called back urgently. Before Mario could react the Invisible suddenly shot up and sent him flying backwards, landing on his face. Mario got up and saw the Invisible charge at him again, Mario quickly rolled out of the way before it could strike down with it's blade, only to be swatted away as the heartless took another swing.

Charlie Brown ducked and flew over every swing of his opponent's sword. Utilising his superior speed, Charlie Brown flew behind the Invisible and struck it in the back with a powerful light blast. A blast which would have surely fried a Shadow and maybe even a Neo Shadow, but this heartless proved much more durable, almost shrugging off the blast before turning around and swinging at him again. Charlie Brown flew back and dodged this attack, only to have the Invisible fly over him and strike from behind. Charlie Brown grabbed the blade in his light covered palms, and with great effort he

managed to pull it out of the Invisible's grip and throw it away, before proceeding to strike the heartless with a roundhouse of punches that sent it flying into the wall.

Charlie Brown floated above the heartless and looked down at it. The Invisible wasn't moving, it could have been knocked out. Or it was faking. If Charlie Brown had really defeated it he was sure the heartless would just disintegrate. He didn't want to take any chances this time, so Charlie Brown lit up his palm and aimed for the Invisible's head. He was distracted however by a loud crash from behind him.

Turning around he saw Luigi had been knocked back into a wall by the Invisible he was fighting. The heartless flew at the green-capped plumber and tried to strike him again, but Luigi slid passed the space beneath the Invisible and it instead struck the wall. Charlie Brown made to fly in and lend a hand, but his own opponent got up and tackled him into the ground. Charlie Brown got up, to see the Invisible holding it's hand out. The sword Charlie Brown had thrown away suddenly floated up and returned to the hand of the heartless, who pointed it at Charlie Brown's face. Charlie Brown sighed, Luigi would have to solve his own problems.

Speaking of whom, Luigi was now rapidly dodging another barrage of attack from the heartless, when it stopped for a moment Luigi took the chance to jump up high and kick it in the face. The Invisible staggered back, before becoming enraged and trying to smack Luigi's head off. Luigi hopped and scurried out of the way, and between all his dodging he still had the time to call out and ask "Hey Sparky, you say these things are called Invisibles! Why?"

As Luigi asked that question, the Invisible pulled back and threw it's sword into the air, before grabbing it again and slamming it into the ground before vanishing from sight. Luigi blinked at the spot the heartless had disappeared from.

"Um, never mind, I think I-huh? Uh-oh" Luigi suddenly found himself surrounded by a swirling ring of dark purple flames.

"Luigi, listen to me! The exact moment those flames stop moving, jump! As high as you can" Sparky instructed from the sidelines. Luigi kept a close eye on the ring of fire as it span around him. When it finally stopped Luigi did as he was told and jumped. The blazing ring closed in on itself, creating a large purple glow which vanished just before Luigi landed. The Invisible reappeared by it's sword a moment later.

Luigi prepared himself as the Invisible flew at him again. Luigi leapt up and punched the heartless in the face with both hands, causing it to lose it's grip on the sword. Before the blade hit the ground Luigi grabbed it and stabbed the Heartless through the hole in it's chest with such force that the blunt sword stuck right through the Invisible. The monsters yellow eyes flashed at Luigi before the heartless died in a burst of smoke. Amazed and not quite sure how he'd just done all that, Luigi sighed in relief and relaxed his stance. Looking at the sword in his hand with interest, Luigi took a few swipes at the air with the blade and held it up in front of his face in a way he hoped would make him look cool. The blade promptly vanished from his hands. Luigi blinked and sighed.

"Luigi, look out!" Mario called. Luigi did not react in time to avoid a hard smack to the face from another of the Invisible's swords, which the monster had thrown at him. Luigi went flying across the room and landed with a thud, apparently unconscious, while the sword returned to it's masters hand. The Invisible looked on at the fallen plumber, it turned back towards Mario and received a strong punch in the face from said hero.

"Hey! That's-a my brother you just gob-smacked!"

The Invisible staggered backwards before slamming it's sword into the ground. Having witnessed his brother's fight, Mario waited as the ring of flames appeared around him and began spinning. When it stopped Mario jumped out of the way, avoiding the attack.

"I hardly see the point in-a that technique" Mario commented as the Invisible reappeared by it's sword. Mario stood firm as the heartless flew at him. Ducking under a long swing of it's sword, Mario bounced up and punched the Invisible in the chest. Then while it was distracted he grabbed it's foot and flipped it over, slamming the Invisible onto the ground. While the heartless struggled to get up Mario jumped onto it's chest and began relentlessly pounding it's face, hitting it a little bit harder with every blow until the Invisible couldn't take any more and died in a puff of smoke. Mario landed steadily and wiped his hands clean, taking a moment to admire his handiwork before running off to check on Luigi.

"Luigi, bro, are you alright?" Mario asked while cradling his brother's head in his arms. Luigi remained completely motionless at first, before suddenly letting out a loud snore. Mario looked at him funny for a moment, then let out a soft chuckle "Yep, you're fine"

Feeling confident his brother wouldn't suffer any permanent head injury, Mario set him down and looked around for the last Invisible. He saw the heartless being chased around by Charlie Brown, who kept trying to strike it with light spheres only to have the Invisible deflect them with it's sword. Finally the Invisible stopped moving, and Charlie Brown charged at it with light covered fists. However, he ended up walking right into a trap, as the Invisible flew up just before Charlie Brown could reach it and then swooped down, nailing Charlie Brown in the face with it's blunt sword. Charlie Brown fell to the ground and slid into the corner. The Invisible prepared to go after him, before it noticed Mario and changed it's course.

Feeling dizzy, Charlie Brown lifted his head up and began pushing himself off the ground. On the other side of the room he spotted Mario dodging swift strikes from the last invisible, landing the occasional blow to the monster's body but having a hard time avoiding being struck himself. Shrugging off his pain, Charlie Brown got to his feet, stretched out an open palm and began channelling light, ready to fire at the monster. He was about to let loose when he suddenly remembered, Mario was in the vicinity. The previous battle with Bowser Jr flashed through Charlie Brown's mind, he remembered his light beam striking Mario off guard, he remembered Mario lying injured, not sure if he was conscious or not. The light faded from Charlie Brown's hand, the boy being too afraid to attack. What if he screwed up again? What if this time he took Mario's head off? What should he do? If he just charged straight in he'd probably get in the way or get struck back by the Invisible. If he fired a light beam or

sphere, he might hit Mario again.

'Oh, good grief. What do I do?' Charlie Brown asked himself, eyes closed tight in panic. He wanted to help Mario, but he was just so afraid...

Charlie Brown's eyes opened suddenly. He remembered Luigi, and how he feared everything but still went out of his way to be a hero. No matter how scared Luigi was, he always stood by Mario's side and fought the bad guys. It was easy for him. With this in mind Charlie Brown floated a bit closer to the action and charged another light beam, raising his hand.

And then lowering it.

'But what if I screw up?' Charlie Brown fretted. Then he remembered what Mario told him back at the diner. He'd said that the Mario brothers screwed up plenty of times when they first started being heroes, but that didn't stop them. The two were great heroes, the most respected people in this whole kingdom, and it was because they never gave up and always gave their best, overcoming their shortcomings to save the day. If they could do it, why couldn't he?

Banishing all negative thoughts from his mind, Charlie Brown stubbornly and determinedly raised his palms.

'Don't think about screwing up. Don't think about failure. Just do what you have to do, believe in myself. Believe in myself already!' Charlie Brown screamed in his head. Abandoning all worries, Charlie Brown finally let loose an enormous beam of light, which flew over Mario's head and struck the Invisible dead on. The heartless fell back into the light, it's body fading away in seconds.

When the light subsided Mario looked up at where the Invisible had just been floating and blinked, looking over his shoulder to see Charlie Brown floating with his palm outstretched. The kid was looking rather surprised at his success. Charlie Brown looked at Mario, who after a brief moment of hesitation smiled and gave him a thumbs up. Charlie Brown beamed, delighted with himself.

Over in the corner of the room, Luigi sat up and let out a big yawn while stretching his arms wide, apparently awaking from a pleasant sleep. He got up and walked over to where his brother was standing. Charlie Brown dropped to the floor and joined them.

"So, did we win?" Luigi asked, stifling another yawn.

"We won, Luigi. We won" Mario replied positively, smiling at Charlie Brown and patting him on the back "Told you so"

As the heroes celebrated their victory, Sparky floated forward from his own corner of the room, looking a lot less enthusiastic than his allies. Charlie Brown caught on to this, and immediately knew something was wrong "What is it?"

"Three Invisibles hiding in a castle. No, that can't be all. If my sister had this trap set, and I'm sure she had some say in it, then it would be a lot more dangerous than this. It isn't over, my friends" Sparky answered grimly. The heroes looked at him in concern

and immediately let their guards back up, preparing for the worst. Suddenly they all gained curious looks.

"Um, Mario, Luigi, did the floor just start feeling... I dunno, different?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Like we might just-a sink into it?" Luigi pondered.

The three heroes looked down at their feet to find that an enormous circle of dark energy had appeared on the floor, and they were standing right in the middle of it. Three screams echoed off the walls as the trio jumped out of the way. The darkness began spiralling, and within seconds a figure began to emerge from the ground. Charlie Brown, Mario and Luigi watched in horror as an enormous creature, a black muscular beast with a flowing red mane and two huge horns. Green thorns were wrapped around it's body and limbs. Two broken chains were also wrapped around it's arms, while an unbroken chain hung between the beasts legs. The monster looked at the trembling heroes with it's glowing yellow eyes, a scowl formed across it's horrible face, it held back it's head and...

"RRRROOOOOOOOOOAAAAARRRRRRR!"

* * *

><p>Back outside, Sally and Yoshi were currently preoccupied fighting Kamek while Snoopy and Woodstock tried to fend off the swarm of Shy Guys.<p>

Yoshi stood panting from the effort of avoiding Kamek's rapid fire attack, Sally patted him comfortingly on the head and encouraged him to go on. The koopa wizard floated above the duo, holding his wand back and charging a massive ball of magical energy. Yoshi stopped panting and looked up to see the magikoopa preparing his next attack. After his magical sphere had reach the size of a basketball Kamek thrust his wand forward and sent the orb flying at Yoshi, who leaned backwards and kicked the magic ball right back at him. Kamek was so taken off guard by the act he did even both to get out of the way, and was sent flying off into the distance by the sphere.

"Wow. Can you do the same thing with a baseball bat, my brother's team could really use your help" Sally quipped. Yoshi chirped happily, before noticing another magic sphere flying at him even faster than the last. Eyes widening, Yoshi turned tail and ran, but was still caught in the radius of the blast, sending him and Sally toppling down the hill, stopping well away from the castle.

Yoshi groaned as he got up and steadied himself. Sally had had the misfortune to land in a puddle of mud, messing up her dress and hair. With a disgusted look, she got out of the puddle and wiped her shoes on the grass.

"Ok, I am definitely sending him my dry-cleaning bill" Sally complained, hoisting herself back onto Yoshi's back. The two looked up to see Kamek swooping down and shooting fire balls at them. Yoshi sidestepped the majority of the blasts before swallowing the last one. His face turned bright red for a moment before he spat out a stream of fire straight at Kamek. Shocked, Kamek ducked to avoid the blast, only to have the top of his hat still get burned off.

Patting the singed top of his hat, Kamek glared down at the duo and charged up his wand for more attacks.

Back up the hill, Snoopy was wildly flailing his arms around in an attempt to strike back at the Shy Guys. However, the fact that he was standing perfectly in place and the Shy Guys were keeping to a safe distance just resulted in him looking silly. Woodstock shook his head, embarrassed by his friends antics. Deciding he'd have to handle things himself, the little bird crouched down into a running position, picked out the weakest looking Shy Guy and rushed forward, flying in loops while aiming to strike the Shy Guy through the eye hole of it's mask. The hooded enemy merely waited until Woodstock was in arm reach then grabbed him, holding him back as Woodstock struggled determinedly to break free of his grip.

The Shy Guy gave the struggling Woodstock a curious look that somehow reflected in it's mask. A loud "Hiyaa!" suddenly echoed, the Shy Guy looked up to see Snoopy land a flying kick to the face. The Shy Guy staggered back from the attack, soon finding himself caught in the downward slope of the hill and falling backwards, ultimately rolling into a boulder and being knocked unconscious.

"Ow... Who put this here?" The Shy Guy wondered in a squeaky voice before blacking out. Back up the hill by the castle Snoopy picked Woodstock up and dusted him off before placing him gently back on the ground and looking down in the direction of the defeated Shy Guy.

"Let that be a lesson to you, no one grabs this bird out of the air except me!"_ Snoopy thought threateningly.

"III IIII, II I III"_

Snoopy looked down at Woodstock, who was pointing nervously with his wing to behind the duo. Snoopy looked back to see one of the other Shy Guys run up and prepare to tackle him. Reacting just in the nick of time, Snoopy leapfrogged over the Shy Guy. As the Shy Guy came to a halt, Snoopy took the opportunity to grab hold of his belt and pull it off. Snoopy then used the belt as a whip to strike at the other three Shy Guys getting ready to attack him, the first Shy Guy was hit hard in the stomach making him fall to his knees in pain, the second had the belt wrapped around his feet to trip him up, and with the third Shy Guy Snoopy actually managed to knock off it's mask. Snoopy and Woodstock at first gave curious looks at the maskless Shy Guy, which turned to looks of utter horror as their minds comprehended what they were seeing. The unmasked Shy Guy covered it's face in shame, knelt down to pick up it's mask and ran away.

The Shy Guy who's belt Snoopy had stolen was still looking around, apparently wondering where Snoopy had gone before eventually realizing he was behind him. Snoopy and Woodstock were still terrified by what they had seen, but the Shy Guy didn't notice, more concerned with the fact that he was missing his belt. Spotting it in Snoopy's paw, the Shy Guy made to pat Snoopy's shoulder. The beagle howled in shock, flipping around and assuming a threatening stance while holding the belt up in warning. The left eyehole of the Shy Guy's mask rose in confusion. Not put off by Snoopy's display, the Shy Guy held out his hand expectantly. Slowly, Snoopy calmed down and looked at the outstretched palm. Looking at the belt he was holding,

Snoopy complied and handed it back to it's owner.

"Thank you" The last remaining Shy Guy said as he re-buckled his belt. Snoopy made a gesture like he was tipping a hat, then proceeded to push the Shy Guy down the hill. A few yards down, the Shy Guy that had previously collided into the boulder shook it's head and sat up, regaining consciousness. The masked hoodlum let out a relieved sigh and it's mouth hole formed into something of a grin. Then the other Shy Guy came tumbling down and crashed into him, knocking them both out in the process.

"Ha, that'll show them to mess with us, won't it"_ Snoopy said boastfully, Woodstock tweeted in agreement, puffing up his chest in an effort to look manly. Snoopy snickered at this display, before suddenly finding himself hoisted off the ground. Shocked, Snoopy began squirming around, looking up to see he had been grabbed by a quartet of hooded creatures with turtle like faces and a single large buck tooth each, and propellers growing out of their heads, which helped them to rise up and carry Snoopy twenty feet into the air. Getting nervous, Snoopy began struggling and hitting his captors, but was too scared to break free at this height. Woodstock, feet still planted firmly on the ground, could only look up and squawk in worry.

* * *

><p>"Duck!"<p>

Taking Mario's warning, Luigi ducked under a swipe from the monster's enormous claws. The green clad plumber was already sporting three deep gashes on his left arm and a lot of battle wear on his clothes. But he was still much better off than his teammates.

The monster continued swiping at Luigi, who just narrowly managed to avoid them for a while before the heartless grabbed hold of him and began spinning him around rapidly, then throwing him hard into a wall. Luigi fell with a thud, looking incredibly battered. The beast crouched down and bounded forward, ready to slice the plumber to pieces, when Charlie Brown suddenly flew in from the side and tackled the beast, forcing it into the wall and proceeding to land several rapid fire punches to it's head. For a moment the monster could do nothing but take the blows, but eventually it kicked Charlie Brown. While Charlie Brown recoiled from the attack the heartless swatted him away, roaring before suddenly becoming invisible.

Charlie Brown regrouped with Mario and Sparky, the former having most of his overalls torn off. Luckily he was wearing red jeans underneath, which also helped to hide some of the blood.

"What the heck is that thing?" Mario asked, clutching a wound on his stomach.

"A Dark Thorn, an elite heartless. More the kind of foe I'd expect my sister to set us up against. Very dangerous creature, even more so when they turn invisible. Usually they evolve from another form of heartless known as a Shadow Stalker. It's going to take a lot more effort to defeat this one. Listen carefully, it may not be visible but these heartless are still heavy footed" Sparky explained. Mario looked over to his brother, still lying in pain. From the looks of it that last attack might have broken his back, or at least injured it

too much to keep him moving. Peeling his eyes and listening carefully, Mario got into a crouching position.

"I'm-a going to go check on Luigi, watch my back" Mario instructed to Charlie Brown, who nodded while lighting up his fists.

Mario charged forward, still listening carefully. Hearing a set of footsteps, Mario sidestepped just in time to avoid a killing blow from the Dark Thorn. Charlie Brown noticed this and fired a light beam. A pained growl could be heard as the Dark Thorn became visible once more, clutching it's eyes where the beam had apparently struck. Mario just kept running as Charlie Brown began forming light spheres in his hands to bombard the monster with.

"You alright bro?" Mario asked as he kneeled over Luigi, who looked weakly up at him.

"Worse than I look, actually" Luigi spluttered back.

"Can you chew?" Mario asked urgently.

"I t-think" Luigi replied. Mario sighed and pulled out the bag of power ups, which luckily Snoopy had left behind in the restaurant. Scurrying through the reduced number of items, Mario eventually pulled out two red mushrooms with white spots and black beady eyes. Luigi opened his mouth wide so Mario could stuff one of them inside for him to chew, while Mario gobbled down the second. A loud sound effect echoed, Luigi's and Mario's injuries began to fade, and even their clothes seemed to repair themselves as the mushrooms effects took place. Luigi got to his feet, stretching his legs and cracking his back to make sure everything was in order.

"Phew. Thank God for magic mushrooms" Luigi said cheerfully. A few seconds later he frowned awkwardly "You know, the non-drug kind, those are bad"

"I know what you meant" Mario said plainly, checking in on Charlie Brown. The Light Guardian was still hurling light spheres at the Dark Thorn. The colossal heartless staggered backwards, trying to cover itself with it's arms. When it had finally had enough of Charlie Brown's attacks ran forward and spun around, sending Charlie Brown flying into a wall, then prepared to run at him again and skewer him with it's claws. Seeing this, Mario ran in front of Charlie Brown, as the Dark Thorn approached he leapt up, put all his strength into his right foot, and kicked the monster in the jaw. It didn't go flying, but the heartless still staggered backwards from the force of the attack, giving Mario a chance to strike at the beasts kneecaps, which seemed to annoy the Dark Thorn more than anything. The heartless tried slicing at Mario, but the plumber out maneuverer each strike and delivered several punches to the beast's face in between. With an enraged roar the Dark Thorn jumped backwards pounded the floor, creating a shock wave that knocked Mario off his feet. Sensing it's opportunity, the Dark Thorn raised it's claws and struck downwards, only to be knocked right back by a light beam Charlie Brown had spent the last minute charging up for.

The Dark Thorn growled and turned invisible once more, leading Mario and Charlie Brown to listen out for it. Luigi meanwhile was now approaching Sparky.

"So, what sort of weaknesses does this thing got?" Luigi asked.

"Light. That's just what all heartless are weak against, but the Dark Thorn doesn't have any other particular weak spots. Defeating it is pretty straight forward, just keep hitting it with everything you've got until it dies" Sparky replied.

"And how long before that happens?" Luigi asked, earning him a shrug from Sparky.

"Depends on how strong this one is. It's right behind you, by the way" Sparky warned. Luigi jumped out of the way to avoid the invisible monsters first attack, but was then backhanded and sent crashing into a charging Mario, knocking them both over. Charlie Brown floated over them and began looking around for the Dark Thorn, listening carefully. The sound of it's footsteps grew close, Charlie Brown prepared to fire, but the beast grabbed both of it's hands and held him up. Making itself visible again, the Dark Thorn roared in Charlie Brown's face and slammed him against the ground. It then continued to slam Charlie Brown against the floor repeatedly until Charlie Brown finally let loose a blast that hit the beasts eyes, blinding it long enough to make it let go, dropping Charlie Brown down next to Mario.

Spitting out a bit of blood, a battered Charlie Brown got up, the effects of his healing ability having visibly slowed down. He exchanged glances with the Mario brothers and grimaced.

'Please tell me this doesn't go on for too much longer'

The Dark Thorn roared and ran forward. Mario and Luigi responded by running in the opposite directions around the heartless, while Charlie Brown floated above it. While the creature focused it's attentions of Charlie Brown, the Mario brothers leapt up from either side of the heartless and simultaneously punched the sides of it's face. This must have done it a great deal of pain, judging by the shriek the beast let out. It responded by swatting Mario away. Luigi jumped on the creatures back and began climbing up it's mane. The Dark Thorn felt Luigi and began shaking around, Luigi held on tight, quickly starting to feel sick as the heartless shook him around. Noticing how well distracted the heartless was, Charlie Brown formed a hammer shaped veil around himself and dove down, striking the Dark Thorn straight in the back, carefully avoiding Luigi while also pinning the monster down. Relieved at the lack of motion, Luigi made for the Dark Thorn's head and punched the creature in back eyes. The Dark Thorn yelped in pain.

Charlie Brown tried hard to hold the Dark Thorn down, but the heartless proved too strong, getting to it's feet, pulling Charlie Brown off it's back and throwing him away. Letting out another roar, the Dark Thorn began running around in circles. The heroes wondered for a moment why it was doing this, but it's reasons became clear when the spots of ground where the creature touched began to glow purple, before rising up as what looked like purple ghosts. the first of the ghosts flew straight for Luigi, head-butting him and sending him flying back a few feet, dissipating as it did so. Noticing this, Charlie Brown set up a sphere of light to guard himself from the purple spirits attacking him while Mario simply avoided the rest of them until they disappeared on their own.

Seeing that it's new strategy was yielding little success, the Dark Thorn skidded to a sudden stop and made another run for the heroes. Charlie Brown lowered his light bubble and fired another light beam at the heartless, the Dark Thorn jumped over this attack and pinned Charlie Brown to the ground. Roaring in Charlie Brown's face, the creature would have bitten his head off if Mario and Luigi hadn't both ran underneath the beast, jumped and punched it in the chest. The Dark Thorn growled in pain, it's momentarily lapse in concentration allowed Charlie Brown to slip free. Tired of being attacked, Charlie Brown summoned a set of light chains, which wrapped around the Dark Thorn, even linking up with it's own chains, and pinning it down to the ground.

The heartless struggled against these new restraints, it took all of Charlie Brown's mental strength to keep the chains tangible. Mario and Luigi saw this as their cue to begin mercilessly beating the monster. Luigi went for punching the Dark Thorn over and over again in the face, while Mario kicked it in the stomach. After about a minute of their pounding, the Dark Thorn's struggles to break free lessened, and Charlie Brown took this to mean that the heartless was weakening. So it took him a little off guard when the Dark Thorn suddenly channelled all of it's strength into standing up and tearing out of the light chains, sending Mario and Luigi sliding away and Charlie Brown floating back a few feet in the process.

"ROOOOOAAAARRRR!" The Dark Thorn let out another roar.

Charlie Brown's head began pounding from all the noise the heartless had been making during the fight. It was this frustration that led to him lifting his hand and firing a light blast at the Dark Thorn while yelling "Be quiet!" The beam tore a small hole right through the Dark Thorn's forehead. The heartless stood motionless for a moment before it's bright yellow eyes dimmed. The Dark Thorn fell on the floor, open mouthed and sprawled out, it's body slowly fading into black smoke. Mario, Luigi, Sparky and Charlie Brown all watched on in amazement as the alpha heartless died before them.

Mario blinked a few times before sending a most impressed look at Charlie Brown, who was himself marvelling over his handiwork.

"Well, glad that's over" Luigi sighed. He then looked worried and asked Sparky "It is over this time, right?"

"Wait a moment" Sparky said. The heroes waited for a minute, but nothing else happened, so Sparky declared "Ok, it's over"

"But what do we do now, the exits are still blocked" Mario pointed out. Not a moment later the dark barriers surrounding the doors throughout the room faded away "... Oh, never mind. Still, what should we do now, keep going?"

"I'm worried about Sally and the others. If we were just attacked, they might have been too" Charlie Brown voiced his concern.

"Oh, good point. Quick, let's go check on them" Mario insisted, and everyone made for the door they had originally entered through.

* * *

><p>Returning to just outside the castle, the battle between Yoshi, Sally and Kamek was still going on, though the old Magikoopa was getting tired. So far he'd tried almost every trick up his sleeve to crush the dinosaur. He'd fired dozens of magic bolts, used all the elemental spells he could think of, levitated rocks to fly at Yoshi, creating duplicated of himself to hound him in all directions, and even summoning a goomba and growing it to giant size. But, as was usual, Yoshi somehow managed to beat him at every turn. And he hated that. Kamek hated the fact that he always lost to Yoshi. Hated it as much as Bowser hated losing to Mario, because that's what the dinosaur was. He was Kamek's Mario. But no more, Kamek refused to lose this time.<p>

Yoshi watched carefully as Kamek floated above him, waiting for the magikoopas next move. With just a quick look down Kamek teleported behind Yoshi, charging up a magic bolt. Yoshi jumped over the blast and onto Kamek's head, stomping the magikoopa into the ground and jumping off him. Kamek groaned indignantly as Sally just laughed.

"Wow, some wizard you are, can't even handle a cute little dinosaur. We got this in the bag Yoshi, this guy's a pushover" Sally said smugly. Steam threatened to escape from Kamek's ears as he got up and began shooting magic bolts around wildly. Yoshi had to duck, jump, turn and dodge in all directions to avoid the rapid fire blasts, which just kept coming and coming until one of them finally hit Sally and sent her flying off Yoshi's back, landing with a shriek and a thud a yard away.

"Yoshi!" Yoshi screamed in worry. Kamek grinned widely, delighted with his luck. As Yoshi ran to go help Sally, Kamek teleported in front of the dinosaur and struck him in the face with another magic blast, knocking Yoshi over.

Coughing slightly, Yoshi looked up to see Kamek floating over him in sinister fashion, brandishing his wand and looking darkly satisfied.

"I've waited countless years for this moment, and now finally it's here. Goodbye, Yoshi" Kamek raised his wand and aimed for the spot directly between Yoshi's eyes...

At the same time all this had been happening, Snoopy was still being dragged through the air by the four Toadies, who showed no more interest in letting him go than Snoopy had in remaining their captive. Woodstock looked up in concern and wondered what he could do to help. He tried flying up to reach Snoopy, but after about eight feet off the ground he fell down again, suffering from a beak bleed. Woodstock tried climbing on some Ivy growing on the walls of the castle, but the vines snapped as he climbed them and he landed on his head.

Shaking off the impact, Woodstock looked up once more to his struggling companion, feeling ashamed that he couldn't help Snoopy. What could he do anyway? He was a small yellow bird, he didn't even weigh a whole pound. He couldn't play tennis, let alone fight a quartet of otherworldly creatures. He was useless, he was utterly useless. Or at least that's what he felt.

With a sigh and a few tears, Woodstock looked downwards, his gaze wandering down the hillside, where something caught his eye. Not too far down the hill there was a floating block that was still yellow with question marks. If Woodstock had learned anything about this world, it was that as well as coins those blocks had power ups, like the ones he'd used back at the restaurant. Chirping hopefully, Woodstock ran down the hillside and underneath the block. Flying in his typical upside down manner, Woodstock bumped into the underside of the block, even his slight weight was enough to release what was inside. He was in luck: A fire flower!. Woodstock grabbed the plant in between his wings, the classical sound effect echoed and Woodstock's body turned a mix of red and white.

Fire Woodstock ran back up the hill to the castle, climbing up some of the less brittle ivy to get a better shot at the Toady. Aiming carefully, Woodstock pointed a wing in the direction of the four Toadies and let loose a ball of fire... which flew right under them. Disappointed but not discouraged, Woodstock shot another fireball at them. This one flew over the flying quartet instead. The Toadies for their part took no notice, just hovering aimlessly while keeping a grip on Snoopy. Seeing he needed a better strategy, Woodstock began shooting as many fireballs as he could in their general area. Most of the fireballs just narrowly missed the Toadies, but one of them finally made contact. The Toady that had been hit let out a scream of pain, released it's grip on Snoopy and fell to the ground. The other Toadies were in such shock and disarray at this occurrence that they ended up dropping Snoopy, who plummeted to the earth.

Woodstock's beady eyes widened in shock, he jumped on down from the ivy and ran to the spot where it looked like Snoopy would land, stretching his wings out to catch him. Then he realised that this would probably only result in him being crushed, and so he braced for impact...

But it didn't come. Curious, Woodstock looked up to see that Snoopy was hovering above him, his ears spinning together like a helicopter, granting him flight. Woodstock smiled at his buddy, who smiled back.

"Forgot I could do this, didn't you" Snoopy said cheerfully.

"II IIII III!" Woodstock tweeted nervously, pointing upwards. Snoopy looked up to see the three uninjured Toadies flying down to grab him again. Motioning for Woodstock to hop onto his lap, which he did, Snoopy flew out of the way, the three Toadies beginning to chase him.

The Toadies chased the now airborne Snoopy and Woodstock all through the air, going over the castle and around the plains. Eventually Snoopy turned around, somehow flying backwards, giving Fire Woodstock a clear view of the oncoming Toadies.

"_Let 'er rip!" Snoopy commanded. Woodstock shot a fireball, taking out the lead Toady. He shot another two fireballs, the two Toadies managed to avoid them, but the one on the right fell victim to the third fireball Woodstock shot his way. The final Toady managed to avoid a steady stream of fireballs Woodstock shot at him, but eventually it too was shot down. Seeing that they were now out of danger, Snoopy hovered closer to the ground, and the friends cheered for their victory, until Woodstock tugged at Snoopy's stomach to get

his attention and pointed downwards.

Snoopy looked where Woodstock was pointing and saw that both Sally and Yoshi were down, and Kamek was hovering above Yoshi and pointing his wand at his face. With a nervous yelp, Snoopy flew down quickly, right before Kamek could fire a fatal magic blast Woodstock shot out a fireball that struck Kamek directly in the backside. Kamek's glasses bulged slightly as his eyes widened and he let out a yelp, hopping around in circles as his bottom burned. Yoshi blinked momentarily before spotting Snoopy and Woodstock, the former of whom gave him a wink and a salute. Yoshi smiled and saluted back.

After a dozen seconds of bouncing about Kamek finally came to a stop, putting out the fire on his butt with a splash of water from his wand and turning around angrily.

"Ok, who's the wiseguy!?" Kamek demanded. Yoshi's tongue suddenly shot out and wrapped around him, dragging Kamek into Yoshi's mouth. Yoshi ran over to where a boulder was and spat Kamek at it, causing him great pain as he hit it.

Kamek slunk to the floor, birds circling his head as he was left dazed from the impact. After a moment he regained his senses, looking up to see Yoshi, Snoopy and Woodstock standing over him in a threatening manner. Sally walked up and picked up the chief magikoopa's fallen wand, pointing it at Kamek's face. Kamek sighed in humiliation.

"Oh how I hate cute animals" Kamek muttered. His attention was caught by the sound of the castle doors opening in the distance, and everyone looked up to see Charlie Brown, Mario, Luigi and Sparky running down the hill to check on them. Kamek's jaw dropped at the sight of them, he jumped up and yanked his wand out of Sally's hand and teleported away, earning an indignant "Hey!" from Sally.

Kamek reappeared before Charlie Brown and the Mario brothers, looking over them like they were unreal.

"How-how did you survive that trap!?" Kamek asked.

"You mean those-a heartless? They were tough, but we're-a the Mario Brothers and Charlie Brown's the guardian of light. It was a no contest" Mario said confidently. Kamek blinked a few times and facepalmed.

"It would appear our new benefactor overestimated the minions he provided us, Bowser will not be happy about this" Kamek said to himself.

"And who would this new benefactor be, Kamek? A thirteen year old boy with a green hat and dark powers, an egg shaped mad scientist? Or perhaps a short, incredibly sexist teen with an unusual, slightly archaic name?" Sparky asked. Kamek eyes the dog spirit.

"All three actually, they showed up in our Doomship last night and night and offered us an alliance to conquer the universe and defeat you" Kamek explained. A few seconds later he face palmed and grumbled "WHY did I just tell them that?"

"So then this wasn't just a coincidence, my sister's forces have

indeed formed a alliance with Bowser" Sparky said gravely. Kamek glared at him and the other, then looked back to find Yoshi and the others heading up to him. He sighed.

"I'd love to stay and discuss the koopas troops recent magor developments with you, but, I really wouldn't because that would get me fired or demoted. So if you need me I'll be heading back to Darkland, ta-ta" That was all Kamek said before he disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Sally and the others approached the group, all eyes on the smoke Kamek had conjured up. Charlie Brown looked down at his sister and ran up to check oh her.

"Are you alright Sally?" Charlie Brown asked, hugging her.

"I'm fine, big brother. A little shook up, and you're going to have to buy me a clean dress before we go home, but otherwise I'm good" Sally replied "So, what did old sorcerer coo-coo brains want?"

"Well Sally, it would appear that my sister's forces have aligned themselves with the koopas, we were all just attacked by heartless in that castle" Sparky told her. Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock all gasped, while Yoshi just looked perplexed, wondering what heartless meant.

"Yeah, it looks like we're in trouble alright" Charlie Brown nodded.

"So, quick question, how big a threat are these heartless anyway?" Luigi asked.

"It varies depending on which species of heartless you're facing, there are countless species of them, and many far worse than that Dark Thorn you just thought. But luckily they there's a limit to how many of them can enter into the realm of light within a day, they're not naturally born into this realm, so the universal barriers between worlds don't normally allow them to pass without permission from the Light Guardian. My sister can send a few through, but not all of them, that's all that's stopping an enormous invasion of Heartless across all worlds. But it's not the heartless I'm currently worried about, I'm more concerned with Joe Agate. If he's recover then that means, as well as Bowser and his minions, we'll have to fight Joe as well as Eggman possibly, if he's recovered any of his machines he could pose a threat. Indeed, we're on for a lot worse than we'd imagined" Sparky's words left everyone feeling a bit discouraged. Charlie Brown and Sally had seen first hand how powerful Joe was, and a villainous alliance did not sound good for them, especially when they barely made it out of this last confrontation alive.

Though everyone else was reluctant, Mario was quick to get over his concerns "Oh well, we knew it was-a coming sooner or later. It's better to know what we're-a up against, that way when we face it head on we'll be better prepared"

"Hmm, he has a point you know" Snoopy said to Yoshi, who nodded and said his name.

"So, if we're all fine, what should we do now" Sally asked the group.

"Kamek said he was heading back to Darkland. Usually he always reports directly to-a Bowser after a mission, so that means he's probably there already. And that means the princess and Peppermint Patty are-a probably there with him now" Luigi reasoned.

"Ok. So, how far is Darkland?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Well, considering we're at this castle now, we've-a got another six different landscapes to traverse and six more castles to go through before getting to Darkland and then Bowser's-a castle" Mario replied.

"And every new land we go to is bigger and more dangerous than the last" Luigi supplied.

Charlie Brown and Sally facefaulted, Snoopy and Woodstock's eyes widened to enormous size and the latter even fainted.

"What?" Luigi asked innocently.

"Isn't there a quicker way to get there?!" Sally asked indignantly. Mario and Luigi exchanged imploring looks and shrugged at her.

"None that we know of" Mario said honestly. The Brown siblings' faces fell, though Luigi had a light bulb light up above his head.

"Wait, what about that-a unexplored pipe garden?" Luigi asked his brother, earning curious looks from his teammates.

"A what?" Charlie Brown asked.

"A pipe garden is basically an area where a large amount of-a warp pipes are collected. The pipes there lead to all sorts of-a places, the underground, the various castles, even the other side of the world in some cases. They're a great way to-a get around, commonly used for transport. And as Luigi just reminded me, there's-a one just a ten minute walk from here that we haven't really explored before" Mario explained, igniting hope in his friends.

"So, do you think one of those pipes might lead straight to Darkland?" Charlie Brown asked. Again, Mario shrugged.

"It's-a possible. I dunno. But it's worth a try, at the very least one of the pipes might-a get us somewhere closer to where we're going" Mario suggested.

"Good enough for me, where is it?" Sally asked.

"Just follow us" Luigi said.

After Sally had hopped back onto Yoshi, the heroes took off on a stroll. Going around the castle instead of through it, just in case there were any more nasty surprises inside for them, the heroes wandered down the other side of the hill and into a valley. Mario and Luigi led the group off the main path towards a forest, eventually leading them to a forest clearing where dozens and dozens of warp pipes of various colours stood.

"Wow, this is a looooot of pipes. You guys must get a lot of business

as plumbers" Sally said, surprised when Mario and Luigi burst out laughing.

"We don't do plumbing as a career anymore, we-a never have the time between fighting evil. Now, let's get looking. Everyone jump down a pipe and report back what you see" Mario instructed. The heroes split up to explore the pipes. Charlie Brown jumped down a yellow pipe, when he came out he found himself in what looked like a bar filled with oddly muscular and vicious looking koopas. Said koopas all shot him warning looks, Charlie Brown smiled meekly.

"Um, is this Darkland?" Charlie Brown asked meekly.

"No, Muscleland" Replied one of the hulking koopas.

"Oh. Well, is Darkland nearby?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Not even close" Replied the same koopa.

"Oh. Ok then, never mind" Charlie Brown replied cautiously, carefully walking backwards towards the pipe while all the muscle-bound koopas watched him dangerously.

"Well, where'd it lead?" Sparky asked as Charlie Brown returned.

"No where I want to go again" Charlie Brown asked, jumping down a normal green pipe.

Sally and Yoshi meanwhile had jumped down a red pipe, coming out in a medieval style town, where all the residents seemed to have elf-like ears.

"Doesn't look too dark, I'm guessing it's not where we're supposed to go" Sally said, her and Yoshi stopped by a shop where a man was selling a lot of strange looking masks "Hey, is Darkland anywhere near here?"

"Hmm? No, it isn't. In fact, it's almost a world away from here. Why do you ask?" The Mask salesman asked.

"Long story, thanks anyway" Sally replied, exiting the store. Her and Yoshi were attracting a lot of attention from the locals, but she seemed not to notice this. Right before the duo hopped down the pipe they passed by a boy wearing some sort of green tunic and hat. Sally took one look at his get up and said "Um, no to be rude, but green is out of fashion this year. I'd recommend wearing blue. Nice sword, by the way" And then Sally and Yoshi hopped down the pipe. The green clad boy watched them leave silently, looking oddly at the creature floating beside him which resembled a glowing blue ball with wings.

Back at the pipe garden, Snoopy dropped down a blue pipe. The screams of several girls echoed through the pipe before Snoopy came popping back out, face red.

"He he, girls locker room" Snoopy told Woodstock, who blushed and giggled.

Luigi dropped down an ordinary green pipe, finding himself back at the site of the Mushroom Castle, which was already nearing

reconstruction by the looks of it. Toad, who was standing on a ladder and laying cement on a row of bricks, looked down and spotted Luigi, waving to him.

"Hey Luigi, save the princess yet?!" Toad Asked.

"Not yet!" Luigi called back, climbing back onto the pipe.

"Ok then, see ya later!" Toad called, going back to cementing the wall as Luigi returned to the pipe garden.

The heroes spent the next six minutes testing out the pipes, to little success. Locals they had ended up in included grassland, the Bean Kingdom, and the village they had visited earlier in the day, where Mario got handed an updated bill of one million and a half coins, earning a resounding sigh once he told everyone.

Mario passed by a row of pipes, sticking his head down them as he went along.

"Rose garden" Mario said after looking down a red pipe. He walked over to a blue pipe and looked down it "Desert ruins" He looked down a brown pipe "Sarasaland" He looked down a yellow pipe "An entire valley made out of deserts. I'll have to remember to visit that world later" Mario commented to himself before looking down a green pipe "Ah-ha, Darkland!"

"You found it?" Sally asked as everyone abandoned what they were doing to look at Mario.

"Yep, and it's right outside Bowser's-a castle too" Mario replied.

"Wow, talk about a lucky deus ex machina" Sally said cheerfully.

"So that pipe leads to Bowser's castle huh?" Charlie Brown asked, Mario nodded "Great, let's go rescue our friends!"

"Hold it" Mario said, holding back an overly enthusiastic Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown gave him a curious look as he seriously explained "We're about to walk right into an enemy base. Now Luigi and I have done this loads of times, but this'll be the first time you've ever done something like this, and we're going up against both our enemies together. It's going to be extremely dangerous. Now I can't ask you to not go, that would be stupid, but I can tell you to be on your guard, give it your all, and be very careful. This is where it really counts, don't lose your cool. Be brave, this is going to be a tough fight. Understood?"

"I... yeah, I understand" Charlie Brown nodded. Mario nodded with him.

"Good"

Charlie Brown turned to his sister "Sally, I'm going to send you back to the light palace now. Take Snoopy and Woodstock and Yoshi and-"

"No way!" Sally said defiantly. Charlie Brown and the other authority figures gave her annoyed but worried looks.

"Sally, I'm only looking out for your own good" Charlie Brown insisted.

"Well then who's going to look out for your own good!" Sally said fiercely "Hey, Peppermint Patty's my friend too, I want to help save her. And you're my brother, you think I'm just going to let you charge into a bad guys evil base with only a couple of plumbers to protect you?! Nu-uh, I'm coming too. Even if I can't help much I'm going to face this with you, and you can't stop me from protecting you. And if you do, I'll nag you until you have no other choice but to let me stay! Understand?"

Charlie Brown was momentarily taken aback by Sally's words. He looked to Sparky and the Mario brother, who just motioned for him to deal with it himself. He looked back at Sally's determined face and sighed "At the first sign that things get too dangerous, I'm sending you back no matter what you say. And you have to stay by Yoshi at all times, don't try to fight anyone that's too tough for you alone"

"Fair enough" Sally said with a victorious smile. Charlie Brown was already regretting his decision, but what could he do? He was still too meek to argue with her, especially when she actually put up a mildly good argument.

Charlie Brown looked at Snoopy and Woodstock, who were both staring straight at him. "I suppose you're coming too?"

Snoopy put on his flying ace hat as Woodstock also put on an army private helmet.

"_The World War I Flying Ace and his buddy in the infantry are ready to engage the enemy, General Pershing! Er-I mean, general Brown? It is Brown right, I didn't mix it up this time?"_ Snoopy's thoughts went from serious to bemused. Charlie Brown almost chuckled, but the seriousness of the matter at hand kept him silent.

"Ok, so, without further ado..." Sparky began, gesturing to the warp pipe. Luigi was the first to jump down the pipe, followed by Sally and Yoshi. Snoopy picked up Woodstock and the duo went in together, while Charlie Brown, Mario and Sparky stayed behind for a moment.

"Nervous?" Mario asked his young pal.

"A little" Charlie Brown said, before noticing his hands were shaking "Ok, maybe a lot. But I'm ready, my friend's life is on the line, and I'm not going to let her down!"

"That's the spirit" Sparky said confidently, floating down over the pipe "Just keep that in mind. Think positive, and things will turn out better" He added before floating down the pipe. Mario prepared to climb in after him, but looked back at Charlie Brown to give him some last words of wisdom.

"By the way, it's-a ok to be scared sometimes. It shows you're not stupid. A man who fears nothing is-a more likely to rush into things and not think everything through than a man who is afraid, but marches on anyway. The people who are brave but still know fear are-a

the smart ones" Mario said, sliding into the pipe. Charlie Brown thought about that for a moment. He wasn't completely sure he believed that one, but he'd keep it in mind anyway.

Charlie Brown got up onto the pipe and slid down. He was momentarily blinded by the darkness, and when he came out he still couldn't see much at first.

When Charlie Brown's eyes finally adjusted to the light, he realised just how Darkland got it's name. The skies were pitch black, and while there seemed to be some slight source of light allowing Charlie Brown to see in front of himself, he still couldn't see very far. The ground here was brown and barren, he could see a tree nearby that was rotting and decrepit, with a leave-less bush at it's side.

Spotting his friends and noticing the direction they were all looking, he turned to see Bowser's castle. And man, what a castle it was. The koopas castle was at least a hundred feet tall. The wall was very high, but there were still several towers in view above it, but none compared to the one at the centre, which was an enormous replica of Bowser's upper body and head, with glowing red eyes and mouth for effect. How they were glowing was a mystery, but the effect was suitably menacing. The doors at the front of the castle were enormous, an unfitting light brown shade mostly, but the metal parts were painted black, and the door handles were shaped like Bowser's head. Yeah, it was a pretty impressive castle. And by that I mean impressively terrifying. It took Charlie Brown a moment to get a hold of himself. When he did he felt sort of embarrassed for being scared, but this place just screamed super creepy.

Sally and the animals felt the same way, they were all looking up at the castle with great apprehension, only the Mario brothers and Sparky looked unfazed, though for good reason.

"... Yikes. Suddenly I'm wondering whether I should have gone back" Sally said in a small voice.

"I could send you back right now if you want" Charlie Brown said, silently hoping she would agree. She immediately changed her mind.

"Nope, I'm going in" Sally said determinedly. Charlie Brown sighed. For a moment he wondered if he had just kept quiet she might have asked to be sent back, but she just didn't want to agree with his suggestion to stay out of things.

"Ok gang, this is it. The big one, once we step inside it's a one way ticket to-a carnage. No turning back. So, answer me now... does anybody need to go to-a the bathroom?" Mario asked, receiving no answer "... Ok then, let's-a go"

* * *

><p>Tiger Lover 16: Ok, and that's that. Whew. This one was a pain in the neck. And I mean a HUGE pain in the neck. I'll be honest, I didn't know what the heck I was doing for most of this, I had most of the major plot points (If you can argue this chapter has a plot) Planned out, but I didn't know how I was going to go about writing this chapter, and I was completely lost during most of it. The whole thing is basically filler, I couldn't skip ahead to the conclusion

too soon because that would have been rushing it, but I still don't like this chapter much. It just seems sloppy. It's not all that bad to be fair, but it's not as good as it should be anyway. I'm glad it's done. So, now that I'm done complaining about that, here's the authors notes and trivia for this chapter:

-To the guest reviewer that keeps leaving suggestions for series to be used in these stories, hope you're still reading this. I hate to disappoint people, but I'm afraid I can't go with any of your suggestions. The Hobbit I have never read the book or seen the movies. I haven't watched Adventure Time or Regular Show, so I can't use any of those series in the story. I do like Calvin and Hobbes, but aside from that one joke last chapter I really couldn't feature the characters in a larger role because, well, they wouldn't fit in very well with the larger story, and I want to try and avoid stuffing in too many characters just for the heck of it. As for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, I love the films, but I would never do a marvel story set within that universe. Why? Well, it's just so... limited. Apart from only starring Avengers and Shield characters so far, and none of the other characters including the best ones (Spidey, F4, X-men), the universe is too grounded, I prefer fantastical. I will be adapting a Marvel universe, but not the Cinematic one, just not right for the story. I'm sorry about all that. I would love it if I could make a comic version of this story, that would be awesome, but unfortunately I don't know anyone who has a deviantart account or can draw very good, so that's out of the question. Sorry.

-So, I'm sure some of you are wondering why Charlie Brown, after pummelling the high powered Joe Agate two chapters ago, had so much trouble fighting anything this chapter. Well, that goes with the explanations of how Charlie Brown's powers worked. The exact level of power Charlie Brown can use is linked in part to his emotional state, and considering everything that's happened in the last two chapters, he's feeling particularly down this chapter, so he's not at all at his best here. He needed a bit of a confidence boost before he could fight properly again, which was much the point of this chapter, to get him ready for the big battles next chapter. Considering Charlie Brown is famous for being both an optimist and a sadsac, it's going to be interesting to see how this affects things in later chapters.

-Like I've said, this chapter is a bit disappointing, but there are some things I liked. I got to explore the Mario world a little more in depth, bringing in a lot of new creatures that inhabit it, such as Monty Moles, Cheep Cheeps and Toadys, which for those that don't know are enemies from the Yoshi's Island series of games that show up to kidnap Baby Mario if Yoshi is separated from him for too long. As they work for Kamek I thought I should use them in this chapter. I don't think this is a perfectly accurate version of the Mario universe, but then again I'd need dozens of chapters to fully represent it, so consider this just a peek into what this world is like.

The fight scenes in this chapter may have seemed a little uneven and less than spectacular this chapter, sorry about that, but I really wasn't with it this chapter. Next chapter will be a lot more awesome. I did kinda like the fight against Bowser Jr though. I wanted to introduce Jr separately from the other villains next chapter, so I put him here. I'm not sure how well I did with him, but I basically tried to portray him as the royal brat who gets his kicks out of

harassing others. It's not far off from his game personality, except his plots are usually much bigger. I imagine this is what he does in his spare time. As shown in the fight he can be pretty dangerous when he wants to be, but he's a pushover compared to his dad, whom he worships. I'll develop Jr more in later chapters, but he won't be a major villain. He'll mostly be a recurring lower ranking antagonist and an annoyance to heroic characters, just some villain that shows up to cause trouble now and again.

-The scene in the Toad Village following the fight was written by my good pal Supah-Toon, it's probably the highlight of the chapter really. I had a little trouble making it flow with the previous scene, but who cares because it was a great one. Supah-toon's jokes are a lot better than mine. The "Yellow dragon of doom" Was my very favourite part of the chapter, I couldn't stop laughing when I read that. I had to edit a few things, but at least 90% of that scene was how he originally imagined it. Props to him.

-So, now Charlie Brown and friends know that the Dark Empire (What I'm calling the villainous organisation, if you hadn't noticed) is working with Bowser, or at least suspect it. I could have saved the reveal for next chapter, but frankly, since it was already revealed what was going to happen at the end of last chapter, I didn't see any point in hiding this from the heroes until next chapter, it wouldn't be much of a big reveal for you people reading this. I also think it kinda ups the stakes more to have the heroes actually know what they're up against and willingly go to confront it.

-I got to introduce two new heartless this chapter. I thought this was important, as I hadn't really used a lot of the heartless so far in this story and, since they are basically the main soldiers of the Dark Army, I figured I needed to highlight them a bit more. Invisibles were chosen as Charlie Brown's groups first opponents because they're one of my favourite heartless from the first game, while I went with the Dark Thorn from Kingdom Hearts II as the big boss mostly because of it's cool design. Yeah, that's all. And the fact that it seemed suitably menacing I guess. The fights at the end were too short and rushed in my opinion, but that's because I was sorta rushing these scenes because I just wanted this chapter over and done with. I promise I'll do better next time.

-Of the things I am proud of in this chapter, one of them would have to be Snoopy. Apart from the last chapter I haven't really got to use him and Woodstock much in this story, which is disappointing because I love writing for the two of them. My favourite parts with them, apart from the diner scene, would have to be Snoopy's alter egos. The Masked Marvel, for those that don't know, is an identity Snoopy assumes to arm wrestle Lucy in a storyline from the comics, and in the special "It was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown", as well as to compete in the decathlon in "You're the Greatest, Charlie Brown". Here I decided to have Snoopy use it as a sort of superhero identity, because Snoopy in a domino mask does sort of make me think superhero. I might do this again later. And I finally got to use Flying Ace Snoopy in this story, even if it was only for a throw away gag.

**Well, I'm glad this is over. Hopefully the next chapter will come a bit quicker, I'm much more excited to write it and know what I'm doing. However, I'm going to have to wait to do that, right now I'm busy co-writing "It's Kingdom Hearts, Charlie Brown" With my good pal

Watanuki-Kun, who just got back after taking a break from this site. I should have had the next chapter for that finished for now, but I've had computer problems making things difficult to write. The only reason I'm publishing this is because my problem is sorted now and I only had one short scene to finish up, so I wanted to get it out of the way. Well, enough rambling, have a nice day. Please review.**

10. You're in the Mushroom Kingdom, CB Pt 3

Tiger Lover 16: Alright everyone? This took a while, like most of my chapters, but I'm glad it's done. I'm going to keep this one short and save the rest for after, so as always, enjoy the chapter.

* * *

><p>Chapter 1, You're In the Mushroom Kingdom, Charlie Brown: Part 3

creeeeeeeeeak.

That was the sound the ancient doors made as the heroes entered the castle. Mario and Luigi were of course the first in, ushering Charlie Brown and Sparky in after them. Snoopy and Woodstock wandered in after them, and after much difficulty Sally managed to force Yoshi through the doors.

Once inside the heroes took the time to get a good look at the entrance hall. The ceiling was a lot higher than it had been in any of the other castles the group had visited thus far, and the décor a lot less inviting. The bricks of the walls were a very dark shade of grey, bordering on black. Several tapestries hung on them, mostly the Banner's displaying Bowser's silhouetted face, though others seemed to depict Koopa kings from generations past. There were no less than six statues scattered around the room, one next to each door on the left and right sides of the hall, and two by the doors directly ahead of the group. The floors were lined with carpets of a blood red colour, and there was little light, mostly coming from candles and torches scattered about bearing red and blue flames. The overall effect of the hall could be described as creepy beyond reason.

Most of the group, including Charlie Brown, were trembling at the eeriness of the hall. Mario and Luigi however were quite used to invading this castle, so it didn't affect them at all. And Sparky, well, it took an awful lot worse than a creepy entrance hall to frighten him.

Mario and Luigi walked forward and looked around, checking every inch of the room for anything out of the ordinary. After being attacked by heartless the duo had a good reason to be cautious this time around. Charlie Brown got a hold of himself long enough to follow them, turning back to Sally, Yoshi, Snoopy and Woodstock and urging them to follow, which they did so after each taking deep breaths to calm down.

"So, where do we go from here?" Charlie Brown asked. Mario turned around to look at him.

"Well, normally we'd-a go for the throne room, that's several rooms

and a bridge away from here. Be on guard, this isn't a safe place" Mario explained, in a much sterner voice than was characteristic of him.

Snoopy passed by one of the statues of Bowser. Quickly getting over his nerves, Snoopy changed his facial expressions to match the statue's. The impression was so good it managed to make Woodstock scream and run up into Sally's hair to hide. Sally took offense to this and pushed him out.

The doors at the end of the room suddenly flew open. The heroes jumped in fright and assumed fighting positions. Two koopas walked into the room, holding both doors open. Mario and Charlie Brown gave the duo imploring looks, to which the koopas threw creepy smiles at the heroes.

"Ah, Mario and... erm, greenstache. And friends" The koopa on the right began.

"Greenstache?" Luigi moaned.

"King Bowser has been expecting you folks. Best not to keep him waiting" The koopa on the left continued for his partner. The heroes exchanged worried looks.

"Bowser knows we're here already?" Charlie Brown asked.

"Joe Agate knows we're here already" Sparky corrected his successor "If my sister has taught him enough, then he'll have been able to sense when we arrived through the pipe"

"So does this mean we're walking into another trap?" Sally wondered.

"Most likely. But that's-a never stopped me and Luigi before, and it ain't-a stopping us now" Mario said determinedly.

"You still have a chance to go back Sally" Charlie Brown pointed out hopefully, earning a hopeful nod from Yoshi. Sally folded her arms.

"I'm _staying_" Sally said firecly. Yoshi sighed. The little dinosaur really wished he could just wait outside, but he wasn't about to leave Sally alone in this situation. For a friend's safety he was willing to face his fears.

With suspicious looks at the two koopas, Charlie Brown and the gang passed through the doors and into a narrow hallway even darker than the entrance hall. As they walked through it, the heroes noticed several paintings lined up along the walls. Most of them of course were of Bowser in impressive, or sometimes goofy poses, even including one of the koopa king doing a headstand. There were also a few paintings of Bowser Jr and various other young koopas that could have been his children. Charlie Brown wondered if he was the only one who thought the eyes of those portraits were watching them go by.

At the end of the hallways the heroes passed through another door, leading them into a room that was completely bare of furniture, but had two rows of enemies lined up on either side. Koopas, goombas, Hammer Bros, Boomerang Bros, Shy Guys, Lakitus, winged koopas, and

even a few creatures that only the Mario Brothers and perhaps Sparky had seen before. The guard of enemies bowed and ushered the heroes onwards. Everyone kept up their guard as they walked across this room. Snoopy even took the time to take up a fighting position and throw several false punches, urging the enemies to react. When they just stood still Snoopy gave up and ran up to re-join the pack.

Feeling slightly unnerved by that last encounter, and feeling a strong sense of foreboding, the heroes continued on through several more dark rooms, until they came out onto a large wooden bridge supported by chains.

Charlie Brown walked along the edge of the bridge, looking down to see that there was a huge pit of molten lava about fifty feet below. With a gulp he stepped back so that he was well away from the edge, pulling Snoopy and Woodstock back when they got too close.

"Is it really safe to have pits of lava around his own castle?" Charlie Brown wondered aloud.

"It doesn't normally effect Bowser that badly. At the times when it melts off-a his skin Kamek just revives him as a skeleton, and then later restores his flesh. But I get-a what you're saying, it's menacing, but impractical" Mario said rather off handedly. The Brown siblings blinked a few times and gagged at the mental images forming in their minds.

While it took the Mario brothers and Yoshi mere seconds to get across the bridge, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Woodstock all took several minutes, so afraid of suddenly falling off the bridge and into the pit of lava that they took every step painstakingly slowly. When the heroes were finally all present, Mario walked up to the next door and held onto the handle, turning to address each of his teammates.

"Ok, this is it. I'm not going to wait this time, so I'm-a just going to say one thing: Prepare yourselves" Mario said, pushing open the door.

Without a moments hesitation the group stepped into the room. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, the throne room turned out to be the most well lit room in the castle thus far. The décor was similar to the entrance hall, with the main differences being that the room was actually twice that size, and of course sported a tall set of stairs at the end leading up to a large throne.

There, high above everything and everyone else in the room, sat the king of Darkland himself. Bowser sat in a regal position, with both of his enormous hands clutching the ends of his throne. As his enemies approached the steps leading up to his glorious seat, the koopa king glowered down at them with a sadistic smile. Mario, Charlie Brown and the others looked up at him. Besides Bowser's throne Joe Agate sat on a smaller seat made out of dark energy, sporting his own matching grin and eating a mushroom, while Doctor Eggman and Thibault stood behind him. Hanging nearby in what looked like an enormous black birdcage were Peppermint Patty and Princess Peach, the former trying to bite her way through the bars after all other forms of attack proved unable to make a dent, while the princess just looked at her with concern for her mentality before spotting Mario and the others down below and eagerly pointing this

out to Patty.

After everyone took a moment to gape at the cage Bowser had trapped their friends in, the heroes turned once again to look at the villains. Bowser laughed.

"You're all early" Bowser began in a pleasant, confident tone. Mario and Charlie Brown glared at him "What, did you finally find that short cut that's been right outside the door all these years? And some people call me stupid, honestl-"

"We've come to take-a back the Princess and Charlie Brown's friend Patty!" Mario cut across defiantly "Let them go now or else!"

"Or else?" Joe Agate chuckled, followed by a round of cackling from the villains, which disturbed the heroes as much as it irritated them "Gee, haven't heard that one before. If you want your threats to have any impact, you gotta give us a little more than that" Joe said mockingly to Mario, then inclining his head to face Charlie Brown, at whom he shot a painfully fake smile "So, Brown, how's the hero thing going? You screwed up and let a whole planets worth of people die yet?"

"No, actually things are going reasonably well" Charlie Brown replied grudgingly.

"For now, but it's only a matter of time" Joe replied, taking another bite out of the mushroom he was eating and disintegrating what was left in his hand. Charlie Brown glared at him before turning his gaze worryingly to the cage. Peppermint Patty saw he was looking and waved casually at him.

"Hiya Chuck, good to see you" Peppermint Patty said in a conversational tone, not sounding at all like a person held against their will in a cramped cage unsteadily hanging twenty feet off the ground "You and those guys just kick Agate's butt, we're fine. I think I've almost broken out" She then proceeded to kick the bars with full force. The only thing she achieved from this was causing the cage to rock back and forth in a hap hazardous manner. Patty and the Princess tried to keep on their feet, but quickly collapsed onto one another. Thibault let out a hysterical laugh.

Bowser tapped the ends of his throne thoughtfully, glaring down at each of the heroes and sizing them up. Sparky floated upwards to face the villains, giving stern looks to Joe and Eggman.

"I see you've made a full recovery Joseph. Forgive me, but I'm not happy for you" Sparky said coldly. Joe shrugged and leaned back in his chair.

"Gee, you're one grumpy all-loving guardian" Agate quipped. Sparky ignored it.

"When did you form an alliance with the koopas?" Sparky asked.

"Just last night, actually" Eggman replied "At first we were going to go to the Marvel world to parley with some dictator called Doctor Doom, but then The Witch sensed you and Charlie Brown were here, so Joe decided it was in our best interests to get in your way"

"So I'd be correct to assume this is the first new alliance you've forged?" Sparky asked, keeping his tone stoic, though hoping very much he was right.

"The first of many. We've already planned our next few moves, we're getting everything ready for when we take your realm by force" Joe answered boastfully. Sparky's glare intensified. At least the villains had not progressed any further than they had.

"That shall not come to pass. And you, Bowser" Sparky turned to face the koopa king "I know you are evil, but even one such as yourself has standards. My sister is a diabolical maniac beyond hope of redemption, as much as I've tried. She'll reduce this entire world to ruin in her effort to "Liberate" the inhabitants. Even if she did make good on whatever she promised you, and I'm certain I know, you would be left the king of a dystopian world even worse off than the kingdom you currently rule over. Why would you side with such people?"

Bowser gave Sparky a calculating look and scratched his chin before answering. "'Cause this sounds like it's my best chance to be a winner for once, and I'd be just as stupid as people think I am if I passed that up"

Sparky stared thoughtfully at Bowser for a moment. It seemed the odds of talking the koopa king out of this partnership were slim. He had watched Bowser's every failure from the confines of the Light Palace, he had seen how bitter and desperate he was to succeed again Mario. And as much as Sparky could argue about how corrupt the Dark Empire was, what could he offer Bowser in exchange for siding against them. They were offering Bowser the chance to achieve his greatest dreams and desires, the sorts of things Sparky could never offer him out of morality. No, it seemed the only way out of this one was through violence. Unfortunately.

"Very well then. But mark my words, you'll regret this decision eventually" Sparky informed the koopa king. Bowser watched the spirit descend to where the heroes stood and sneered at his words.

As Sparky floated down he exchanged glances with Charlie Brown and Mario. He nodded at them, and they nodded back in unison.

Mario stepped forward and looked up at the villains.

"Ok then, I'm-a not in favour of needlessly prolonging things, so how's about we-a get to the fighting part already?" The over-alled hero suggested. Joe got up and stretched his arms and legs.

"Big nose has a point, I'm in the mood for some butt-kicking" Joe said casually.

"You'll get your turn. But for now, I promised my children they'd be getting some new playmates..." Bowser got up and put his hands at the sides of his mouth to shout "OH KIDS! PLAY TIME!"

Two doors at either side of the room burst open, and before the heroes could register it, seven new figures charged into the room and surrounded them. On closer inspection they appeared to be Koopa's, though with much more distinct features, notably they all had spiked shells like Bowser and most also sported hair.

Mario and Luigi got into battle positions while Charlie Brown, Sally and the animals just looked at the koopas in confusion.

"Who are-"

"The Koopalings. Bowser's kids" Mario answered Sally "And I'd recommend you be on your guard right now"

One of the koopas leapt forward right in front of the group and gave them a playful smirk. He had large oval shaped blue eyes, five spikes of blue hair growing out of his green head and the back part of his shell was blue, though the front was the same orange and yellow that was typical of the koopalings.

"I'm Larry Koopa, youngest and cutest of the koopalings. I lie and cheat my way to victory, which you're all about to figure out!" The boy introduced himself in a voice that could be described as the children's equivalent to a seedy merchant. With a mocking laugh at the heroes, Larry jumped back into place.

The koopaling to Larry's left stepped forward. He was much more distinct than his little brother, and all of his siblings actually. While most of the koopas clearly had the same complexion as their father, this one had a very dark grey skin tone, including a nearly black spiked shell on his back. His face however was mostly chalk white, with the exception of a rather unique star mark over his left eye. He had a much more rounded head and body shape than his siblings, which served to make him look bulky in comparison, as well as three long black hairs growing out of the top of his head.

He growled at the heroes before introducing himself in a gravelly voice "I'm Morton Koopa Jr. I'm the second youngest and the toughest of us koopalings. I'm rough and tough and ready to squash you all flat! With my trusty hammer I'm a menace, always crushing anything that gets in my way or which I otherwise don't like! And I don't like any of you guys at all, so I'm REALLY going to squash you! I'll squash you right down into the ground, squash you so hard that all your guts'll come squirtin' out! Grose I know, but that's what I'm gonna do! I'll squash, bash, smash, crush, stomp and pound ya! I'lll-"

Morton koopa Jr's rant was cut short when the koopaling standing at his side leaned over and bonked him on the head and then kicked him in the shin, causing him to go into another long rant under his breath. The rest of the koopalings sighed in relief at this.

"We really need to get a muzzle for him" The koopaling who had hit Morton quipped. She was clearly the only female among the koopalings, as emphasized by her pink shell, big pink lips, pink bow with white spots and pink high healed boots. Though oddly enough, she was one of only two of the koopalings to actually be bald. The female koopaling also had a babyish face that was the same tan colour as the rest of her body, unlike her brothers. She also sported two large yellow ring-like bracelets and a red beaded necklace.

The female koopaling strolled in front of the heroes and stood before them in a smug, full of herself manner "I'm Wendy O. Koopa, the most lovely and beautiful girl in all of Darkland"

Sally lowered herself down near her brother and snarkily said "I'm guessing koopa's must have a very low standard of beauty" She was promptly struck in the dead centre of her head by one of Wendy's bracelets, which flew back to her afterwards like a boomerang, while the force of the impact caused Sally to collapse off of Yoshi and onto the floor.

"STILL BETTER LOOKING THAN YOU, BLONDY!" Wendy yelled in a shrill and angry voice while her siblings chortled at her actions.

Snoopy and Woodstock helped Sally rise unsteadily to her feet. After shaking off the pain she became enraged and charged forward, having to be restrained from pouncing on her attacker by Charlie Brown.

"Let me at her! Let me at her!" Sally yelled, throwing her fists wildly and sending a death glare at the koopa girl.

"Just-wait-a moment" Charlie Brown gasped, struggling to restrain his volatile sister. Wendy O. Koopa gave Sally a smug smile and turned her back on her, walking back into place in a super-model fashion.

Sally calmed down enough to listen to the next koopaling introduce himself. He was the wildest looking of the koopalings, with palm-tree styled green hair and a green shell. Another individualistic trait of his was that he wore glasses, which combined with the blue in his eyes being separated from his pupils by a circle of white gave his eyes a spiralling appearance. He was the tallest and thinnest of the koopalings, and sported a number of visible fangs. All in all these features served to make him look crazy and demented, an impression bolstered by his crazed laughter before addressing the heroes.

"I'm Larry Koopa, the kookiest koopaling of them all. I'm also the smartest, don't let Ludwig take the credit, I build all the machines around here!" After this brief introduction Larry returned to his original standing position while still laughing maniacally. Charlie Brown was a bit put off by it.

The next koopaling who stepped forward was perhaps the most muscular, which gave him a somewhat "Manly" appearance compared to his siblings, though the fact that his face was pink kinda put that into question. He also wore pink sunglasses that obscured his eyes, and he had a purple shell on his back. The koopaling looked over the heroes and stretched his muscles at them in an effort to look intimidating.

"I'm Roy Koopa, I'm the toughest, meanest and baddest koopaling of them all! Mess with me and you'll get clobbered!" Roy introduced himself, slamming his right fist into his left palm to emphasize.

As Roy got back into place, the sixth koopaling rolled forward. And by that I mean he was riding on an enormous rubber ball, while also juggling several smaller purple balls. The koopaling, who was by far the smallest and sported a rainbow coloured Mohawk, looked happy and carefree in his juggling, laughing childishly as he continued to act like a clown without so much as acknowledging the heroes. Charlie Brown, Sally, Snoopy and Woodstock were all giving him odd looks, while the Mario bros and Yoshi were of course unsurprised. After almost a whole minute of the ball riding koopaling just playing

around, the other koopalings began to look annoyed and exchange glances, except for a seemingly amused Iggy.

"Lemmy, you're supposed to introduce yourself!" Larry called to his brother. Lemmy looked over at him, losing concentration on his juggling, which resulted in the three balls bouncing off his head in unison, causing Lemmy to stumble back before falling off the large ball he was riding. The littlest koopaling laid there silently for a moment... then burst out in renewed childish laughter. The other koopalings looked mortified.

"Are we sure we can't get king dad to let us sell him to the circus?" Roy asked his siblings. Wendy shook her head.

"You don't give up on family, he says. Like it or not we're stuck with him" Wendy told him.

"I still argue he'd be a lot happier in the circus" Larry said grouchily.

"We're not selling him, end of story" Wendy said sternly. The other koopalings muttered loudly before Lemmy got back up onto his big rubber ball and rolled back into his original standing position... if you could call it that.

"Hard to believe he's the second oldest" Luigi whispered to Charlie Brown, who noticed that the Koopalings were now all putting on earplugs. He wasn't sure why, until a loud blast of piano music struck his ears. Loud, horrible, horrible, HORRIBLE piano music that barely sounded like music at all. It was worse than Luigi's singing, the sound of it was so bad it reduced all the heroes to their knees, clutching their ears in pain as their ear drums threatened to bleed. Through the pain of it all, Charlie Brown somehow managed to look up to see who was behind it all. Playing at the vial piano was the last koopaling, with wild blue hair and a wicked face, sporting blue eyebrows, a single buck tooth and a blue spiked shell, the koopaling pounded away tunelessly at the keys of his piano, finishing off by slamming all the notes at once and holding them down for one loud boom. As the heroes panted and spluttered on the floor, the blue haired koopaling tossed the piano aside and laughed maniacally at them.

"And I am Ludwig Von Koopa, the magnificent! Eldest of the Koopalings, heir to the throne of Darkland and the Koopa Troop! My talent for music is rivalled only by my cruelty, as you shall soon find out"

Through sheer force of will, the heroes managed to recover from that bout of horrible piano playing and rise to their feet, though all feeling somewhat unsteady.

'Schroeder would not get along with this kid' Charlie Brown thought to himself.

The rest of the Koopalings calmly removed their earplugs, laughing at the suffering the heroes had just endured. Up above their father and the other villains hadn't been so clever to use earplugs, though the distance had at least minimised most of their sufferings. Bowser, on the other hand, actually seemed to enjoy the performance, as he smiled down at Ludwig and then nudged Eggman's shoulder.

"Pretty good, ain't he?" Bowser said proudly. Eggman sneered.

"It's like listening to road works" Eggman quipped. Bowser turned furiously on him.

"What was that?!" Bowser growled. Eggman sweat dropped, blathering nervously as he tried to correct himself.

"Erm... it's like... Rodwork, a composer from my world. He makes all the best piano symphonies" Eggman told him. Bowser glared at him for a moment before his frown turned into a satisfied smirk.

"Oh. Yeah, figures my son would remind you of him. He's gonna be big someday" Bowser said boastfully, turning his attention back to his kids and enemies below. Eggman wiped the sweat off his brow and sighed, chuckling lightly when he realized he'd fooled the dig dope.

As Charlie Brown and friends shook off the lingering effects of Ludwig's terrible music, one more figure swooped into the room through the back door. Kamek flew over the Koopalings and hovered above them on his broomstick, looking down at the heroes.

"Oh great, you again. Haven't we got enough pests to worry about?" Sally groaned while Yoshi glared at his enemy. Kamek straightened his glasses and held his beak high.

"I'll have you know I'm as displeased to see you knaves again as you are to see me. But no worry, I won't be seeing you for long" Kamek began, looking down at the Koopalings "Ok children, time for a practical lesson in spellcasting. Wands at the ready-"

On Kamek's order the Koopalings pulled out their own wands identical to his, though each had a uniquely coloured jewel at the tip, orange for Larry, red for Morton, purple for Wendy, yellow for Iggy, black for Roy, green for Lemmy and blue for Ludwig. The koopalings pointed their wands at the hero group, all of whom looked concerned.

"Now, aim carefully children, and..."

"When he gives the word Charlie, put up a shield. As thick a shield as you can manage" Mario urgently whispered to Charlie Brown.

"FIRE"

All at once the Koopalings shot multiple coloured blasts of magic from their wands, which joined together into one enormous swirl of energy that rocketed towards the heroes. As he had been told Charlie Brown set up an enormous light shield, but for all his effort he couldn't hold back the full force of the blast when it collided, and both the shield and the energy blast exploded against one another, the shockwave of which sent the gang flying in various directions.

Scattered and shaken, the heroes steadily recovered. Mario got to his feet first and ran to regroup with Charlie Brown, only to have his path blocked by Larry Koopa. The youngest koopaling pointed his wand at Mario's face and grinned sinisterly. Mario responded with a

determined look while crouching down into a fighting position.

Twenty feet away, Luigi took a little longer to get to his feet. And when he did he was immediately pushed down again via a kick to the back of his head. Turning to face his attacker, Luigi saw Iggy Koopa standing over him, laughing wildly and ready to fight. Luigi glared and flipped himself back into a standing position.

Over with Snoopy and Woodstock, the duo found themselves briefly dazed by their sudden flight. Snoopy recovered first, and when he noticed Woodstock was still seeing stars he picked the little bird up and shook him up and down a few times before dropping him on his feet. Defying logic, this seemed to snap Woodstock back to reality.

"_IIII, II III II!_" Woodstock chirped in an annoyed tone, not liking being shaken. Snoopy gave him a bemused look.

"_Hey, we're under attack by a band of walking talking turtle kids, if you want to complain to anyone, then yell at them_" Snoopy said defiantly. Woodstock huffed and turned away. His eyes widened and he let out a shriek before jumping out of the way. Snoopy scratched his head before noticing that Lemmy Koopa was rolling his enormous rubber ball at him at ninety miles an hour. Letting out a yelp, Snoopy only barely managed to avoid becoming road kill as Lemmy Koopa zoomed passed, before coming to a very sudden stop a yard away and flipping the ball around to face Snoopy and Woodstock again.

The duo looked up at Lemmy Koopa, who was looking at them with an expression of childish glee.

"Yay, puppy! I wanna play with the puppy!" He screamed eagerly. Snoopy shuddered in terror.

"_Um, sorry kid, but I'm a hunting dog, not a playing dog_" Snoopy thought nervously. Woodstock gave him an innocently confused look.

"_III IIII II_"

"_I know I hate hunting, just shut up_" Snoopy whispered irritably.

Of course any hope of a plan Snoopy might have had with that comment was futile, for despite being an anthropomorphic turtle Lemmy could not understand Snoopy. The second oldest koopaling laughed a few times and pulled out a few more purple balls.

"Let's play puppy!" Lemmy yelled, throwing one of the balls at Snoopy and Woodstock. The duo leapt back a few feet, quite fortunate they did, as the ball exploded on contact with the ground and sent them flying back a bit. After shaking off the impact, Snoopy and Woodstock looked on in terror at Lemmy.

"_Yikes, there's no way I'm playing fetch with any of those balls_" Snoopy quipped. Lemmy Koopa giggled as he rolled forward and began hurling more explosive balls at the poor animals. Snoopy and Woodstock screamed in terror as they frantically avoided the blasts.

Meanwhile, Sally and Yoshi had landed the greatest distance away from the rest of the group, with Yoshi landing on top of Sally. After struggling for a while to pull herself out from under the dinosaur, Sally finally tapped his neck and yelled "Yoshi, please get off of me!"

With a dizzy squeak, Yoshi rolled off of Sally and onto his stomach. Sally took several deep breaths before sitting up, glad she was no longer being squashed. She rubbed her head and tried to think about what to do, when suddenly a yellow ring flew over her head. She saw the ring ricochet off the wall and fly at her again, ducking just in time to avoid a likely decapitation. Yoshi pushed himself to his feet and checked that she was alright, Sally gave him a quick glance before noticing their attacker, Wendy O. Koopa, who was sliding her left bracelet back on.

The female Koopaling gave Sally a mocking look "Aww, did baby fall down?" She asked her in a voice one might use when speaking to an infant. Sally was rightfully ticked.

"Who are you calling a baby, have you seen your face in the mirror lately?!" Sally said spitefully. Wendy raised an eyebrow and shrugged casually.

"I guess you're right. Maybe I'm the cute young one. You strike me more as an old bat anyway" Wendy offered back. Sally's ears were puffing out steam.

"Why you-I'm gonna knock some manners into you!" Sally declared, rolling up her sleeves. Yoshi watched her do this and tried to imitate her, but then realized he didn't have sleeves, which made him feel disappointed.

Wendy sized up her competition, smiling smugly _'This girls clearly as much of a brat as I am, and the dinosaur's hopeless without Mario or Luigi to steer him. This'll be a piece of cake. Wonder if King Dad'll buy me a new tiara or something for killing these two?_' She thought to herself. While she was day dreaming Sally took the opportunity to run up to her and attempt to punch her in the face, thinking Wendy wouldn't notice her. She did, and when Sally tried to hit her Wendy sent her flying with a blast from her wand.

Sally landed with a thud, looking dizzily at her attacker.

"You're gonna have to do better than that, blue girl" Wendy said arrogantly. Sally glared at her.

"Alright then, pinky" Sally spat back, getting up and hopping on Yoshi's back. Yoshi stood up tall and yelled his name in a heroic fashion. Wendy let out a relaxed laugh and pointed her wand at the duo, prepared for a battle.

And now let's check in on Charlie Brown. Having took the full blunt of the blast when his shield shattered, it took Charlie Brown the longest to get up. And when he did he found himself surrounded by Ludwig, Roy and Morton Koopa, the former brandishing their wands like guns at him, while Morton held an enormous black hammer, the end of which he was tapping in his palm while giving Charlie Brown a menacing look. Charlie Brown gulped.

"I suppose I'm going to have to fight all three of you by myself now?" Charlie Brown mused.

"Pretty much" Ludwig said, grinning wickedly as his wand glowed dark blue. Charlie Brown sighed heavily.

"When this is over, I'm going to ask Sparky to let me talk with the Ancients about why I have such terrible luck" Charlie Brown complained to himself. A moment later Ludwig and Roy fired magic bolts from their wand at Charlie Brown, who easily dodged the first one while blocking the second with a small light shield, only to be left open to a hammer strike from behind by Morton Koopa Jr, sending him bouncing across the floor. He shook off the attack and saw the three most formidable Koopalings laughing over him. With another sigh Charlie Brown lit up his fists. This was going to be a tough fight.

Up by the throne, Bowser and the other villains watched on in amusement as Kamek hovered up to observe with them.

"Popcorn, my lord?" Kamek asked.

"Lots of it, Kamek" Bowser said greedily, watching Larry and Mario duke it out. Kamek waved his wand and an enormous bag of Popcorn appeared on the arm of the throne, which Bowser quickly munched into.

Feeling a tap on his shoulder, Kamek turn around to see Joe and the others looking at him expectantly. Taking the hint, Kamek magicked-up some more bags of popcorn for each of them. Thibault glared at his.

"What, no butter?" Thibault said rudely. Kamek sighed and grumbled something about ungrateful youths.

Back on the ground, Luigi was attempting to land a hit on Iggy Koopa, who dodged his attacks with almost no difficult, literally prancing around Luigi as the green clad publisher's attacks grew more frantic. Iggy's wild and mocking laughter only served to agitate Luigi further, causing him to steadily pay less attention to what he was doing. Getting tired after a few minutes, Luigi stopped to take a breather. Iggy seized the opportunity to run around Luigi and laugh louder. In a fit of annoyance and rage, Luigi began throwing his fists around wildly, viciously punching the air around him in an effort to beat Iggy silly. An effort wasted because Iggy had leapt of to the side out of reach the moment Luigi let loose, having counted on just this sort of reaction. After a while Luigi dropped to his knees and stopped flailing around, panting heavily. Iggy bent down to look him in the face, smiled sweetly, then pulled his wand out from behind his back and smacked Luigi in the face with it. Luigi rubbed his cheek and looked at Iggy, who proceeded to blast him in the stomach with his wand. Landing ten feet away, Luigi let out a groan and painfully raised his head to see Iggy leap for joy and fire multiple green magic blasts at him. With a fearful yelp, Luigi stumbled to his feet and ran to avoid them.

While Luigi may have been struggling, Snoopy and Woodstock were faring even worse. Not having much fighting skills and lacking power-ups, the beagle an bird could only run, duck and cover as Lemmy

Koopa rolled around them, pelting the duo with his colourful bombs.

At the moment the duo were backed into a corner. They threw a fearful look at their tormentor as Lemmy enthusiastically sped towards them. With precision timing, Snoopy grabbed Woodstock and barrel rolled out of the way, leading Lemmy to crash into the wall, scattering a few of his bombs about the place in the process. One of the colourful bombs landed near Snoopy, who stumbled back to avoid it. The beagle blinked his eyes however when the bomb just sat there. Curious, he started to inch closer, only to have the darned orb explode right in his face. Surprisingly, this didn't do much damage apart from singeing the fur on his face. It did tell him something though, the bombs seemed to have a delay between landing and exploding, a fact he hadn't caught on in his panic to avoid them.

Placing Woodstock on his feet and watching Lemmy Koopa regain his balance, Snoopy smiled to himself in a manner most crafty. Woodstock took this to mean he had a plan.

With barely a moments notice Lemmy was back to rolling around on his big rubber ball and chanting "Puppy! Puppy!". Rolling around the corner of the room, he set his path directly for Snoopy and Woodstock again, taking out and juggling a few more of his makeshift bombs while he was at it. Snoopy and Woodstock made another timely dodge as he sped past them, as he turned again Lemmy threw a few more bombs at the animals. Snoopy and Woodstock dodged the first three, but then as the forth neared Snoopy jumped up in the air and grabbed it, then right after landing Snoopy jumped up like a basketball player and tossed the ball back at Lemmy. The bomb went off just half a foot away from the immature Koopaling, the force of it sending Lemmy flying off his rubber ball.

Lemmy landed on his behind, his head falling lopsided as he admired the stars floating around his head. When the stars faded away he pouted, and then tried to retreat back to his rubber ball, only to find Snoopy biting into it. Lemmy watched with childish confusion as Snoopy's canines dug into the ball and poked a hole in it, letting all the air out. The rubber ball deflated into a rubber puddle, which Snoopy flipped like a pancake with his foot so that it landed before Lemmy, who's eyes widened in shock. Tears forming in his eyes at the loss of his favourite toy, Lemmy let out a whine and cried like a baby. Snoopy and Woodstock watched on with mixed feelings.

"You know, I'd almost feel bad for the kid... you know, if he hadn't just tried to blow us up" Snoopy noted.

"III IIII" Woodstock agreed.

After a minute long hissy fit, Lemmy dried his eyes and glanced back at Snoopy and Woodstock. With a sniff and a glare, Lemmy pulled out his wand and waved it about. Snoopy and Woodstock let out shocked exclamations and ran at their opponent, only to have the floor beneath them suddenly turn to ice. Slipping around precariously, Snoopy and Woodstock could only struggle as Lemmy slid forward and crashed into them, causing them to flip through the air a few times before landing painfully on the ice. The duo groaned, they both tried to get up, but with the slippery surface beneath them neither could make it off of their stomachs.

As Snoopy and Woodstock struggled, Lemmy retraced the claws on his feet and began skating around the ice rink he'd created throughout a whole fifth of the room, occasionally performing tricks such as jumping into the air and spinning around three times before landing with all the grace of an Olympic skater.

After a few minutes of flopping around like fish, Snoopy and Woodstock managed to get themselves into a standing position. Snoopy looked over the new terrain and hummed to himself. A light bulb lit up above his head, and out from the pockets of his fur Snoopy pulled out a long woollen hat.

"_This looks like a job for the world famous skating instructor_" Snoopy said to himself. He looked down at Woodstock still struggling to maintain a good grip on the ice, and out of mercy Snoopy picked him up and stored him in his hat.

Lemmy suddenly skid past the duo and poked out his tongue at Snoopy, making silly gestures around his head to add to the insult. Suppressing a growl, Snoopy crouched down and took off after him.

Away from the freshly forged skating ring, Mario was dodging magic blasts left and right. Between every two blasts Mario tried to make a dash for Larry Koopa, but the youngest koopaling kept forcing him back. Narrowing his eyes at the plumber, Larry changed his tactic to charging up energy in his wand and hurling balls of magical blue fire balls. Mario ducked under the first, then did a running jump over the second, sliding across the ground under the third blue fireball and crashing his way through the koopa prince, Larry flipped around a few times before landing on his stomach. Shaking his head, Larry made to get up, only to have Mario grab him by the tail and spin him around. After picking up enough momentum, Mario released Larry and sent him flying smack dab into the wall.

Larry rolled onto the floor, looking to have been knocked out from the impact. Cautiously, Mario approached the downed Koopaling, looking into his face to determine if he was really unconscious. For a few seconds Larry remained perfectly still... then his eyes shot open.

"Gotcha!"

Mario had no time to react before Larry poked him in both eyes. As Mario stumbled back clutching his face, Larry got up and kicked him in the shin, bonked him on the head, then ran around and kicked him in the back simultaneously. As Mario tried to get up Larry kicked him in the face, laughing at the plumbers pain.

Up by the throne, Eggman nodded his head while watching the appalling display.

"I must say my friend, your son is the sneakiest, most devious, dirtiest cheater I've ever seen" Eggman informed the father, who could only nod.

"I know" Bowser said, tears of joy forming in his eyes as he sniffled "I'm-I'm just so proud of him" Bowser wiped the happy tears from his eyes as Eggman patted him gently on the shoulder.

And now lets check in on Sally, Yoshi and Wendy. Their fight so far had been a little more even... but things can change quickly.

Yoshi made to charge at Wendy, who fired a blast of magic from her wand. Propelling himself off the ground with his powerful legs, Yoshi leapt over the blast and right over Wendy. Landing a few feet behind her, Yoshi shot out his tongue and grabbed onto the wand, which Wendy struggled to hold onto. As the reptiles played their tug-of-war, Sally snuck up from behind Wendy and pulled back her fist, intending to punch the koopa girl in the back of the head. Right as she was about to do that however, Wendy pushed her foot backwards and kicked her in the stomach. As Sally stumbled back clutching her abdomen, Wendy pulled at her wand with all her might, then began swinging Yoshi around by his tongue. Quickly getting dizzy, Yoshi lost his grip and went flying across the room, bouncing off the floor several times as he landed.

Wendy O Koopa turned around to face the irritated Sally, giving the girl a smug little grin. Getting angry, Sally aimed another punch to the face, which Wendy easily blocked. Sally threw several more punches, all of which were effortlessly blocked by Wendy, who even had the nerve to look bored as she did so. Sally made to kick her, and Wendy grabbed her foot and tossed her aside. Sliding on her face, Sally made to push herself up, only for Wendy to pin her down with her foot.

"You don't know much about fighting, do you girly?" Wendy said, her voice snarky and snobby "Your moves are all so predictable, you clearly have no idea what you're doing. I've spent my whole childhood fighting people much stronger than you, you don't have a chance. Now why don't you just give up, spare me the effort of throttling you?"

"Why don't you try some moisturiser, you look like a hag!" Sally shot back defiantly, struggling to free herself. Wendy's face turned red as steam shot out of her ears.

"Why you little-alright, now I'll fix you!" Wendy shrieked, aiming her glowing sceptre at the back of Sally's head as the poor girl struggled and squirmed beneath her.

A loud squawking sound echoed. Wendy made a confused expression before receiving a hard head-butt from Yoshi. The magic bolt she had been preparing was knocked off course (Eventually knocking Kamek's hat off) as Wendy herself was sent rolling back a few feet. Wendy shook off the attack and looked back at Sally, whom Yoshi was helping to stand up. Growling lowly and pouting childishly, Wendy looked around for her wand, which she saw had landed a short distance from her. She made to run and grab it, only for Yoshi's tongue to shoot out and trip her up.

"Good boy" Sally said to Yoshi, who chirped happily. Wendy started to get up again, an Sally ran to retrieve the wand before she could. Noticing this, Wendy swung around and hurled one of her bracelets at Sally, which ricochet off her stomach and knocked her down. While Wendy waited for the bracelet to return to her she saw Yoshi charging at her, so she threw the second bracelet at him. Yoshi stopped and ducked under the bracelet, but was knocked on the back of the head as the bracelet stopped in mid-air behind him and began making it's way back to it's owner. Yoshi was pushed to the floor in the

process.

Sally and Yoshi recovered from their assaults and stared at Wendy, who threw vicious smiles at the both of them as she let loose her bracelets at them again.

"_This is just not a good day for me and fighting"_ Charlie Brown mentally sighed to himself. He was currently on the floor, having fallen victim to one of Ludwig Von Koopa's magic bolts. As the eldest Koopaling laughed arrogantly at his perfect shot, Morton Koopa Jr was making a run for Charlie Brown, leaping up into the air above him and preparing to strike with his hammer. With a gulp, Charlie Brown propelled himself forward with his flying power-another minute and his head would have been crushed like a grape.

Not exactly checking where he was going Charlie Brown ended up banging into the side of the wall, as he tried to get back up from the impact Roy Koopa appeared out of nowhere, picked him up by the legs and bashed him against the wall. The bullying Koopaling repeated the process several times, each strike to the wall becoming increasingly more painful to poor ol' Charlie Brown. Finding it hard to concentrate under the current threshold of pain he was enduring, Charlie Brown lit up his hand as bright as he could, succeeding in blinding Roy long enough for the koopaling to drop him. Charlie Brown wasted no time sending Roy across the room with a light punch. Charlie Brown sighed with relief, but he didn't have much time to relax as Ludwig began spitting fireballs at him.

Setting up a light shield to repel the fireballs, Charlie Brown lit up his fists and began hurling light spheres at Ludwig, who ducked and leapt over them while firing his own magic bolts from his sceptre. Charlie Brown ran to dodge the blasts while keeping up his assault, neither opponent having much luck at hitting each other. But the concentration it cost to keep up the attack did give Morton Koopa a chance to run up from behind and swat Charlie Brown with his hammer.

With an anguished "AUUUGGH!" Charlie Brown was sent crashing into the ceiling. Quickly peeling off, Charlie Brown began falling to the ground, catching himself moments before he hit the ground and floating safely over the floor. Getting up and shaking his head a few times, Charlie Brown looked around for his attackers. Roy Koopa was now charging at him from the front while readying a shoulder tackle, while Morton Koopa Jr was doing the same thing from behind.

Charlie Brown had only a split second to react. If he tried attacking he'd probably only have time to strike one of them away, he'd still be left open to the other brother's attack. He could try setting up a shield, that might work? At the last moment, Charlie Brown decided to fly up out of the way, letting the two muscular koopalings tackle into one another. They both screamed afterwards, clutching their aching shoulders.

"Yowch! Watch where you're going, big mouth!" Roy grumbled, shaking the fist of his uninjured arm at his younger brother. Morton was not pleased.

"It wasn't my fault he flew out of the way, it's his fault! But if it had to be one of us at fault, it would be you, not me! I did what I was supposed to do right, you just got in my way, I'm never wrong!"

Yes, it was clearly, plainly you that weren't watching what you were doing, I could never be responsible for making such a foolish mistake! And another thing-gah!" Roy began strangling Morton.

"Will you shut up!" Roy growled venomously as he choked his brother.

Up above Charlie Brown watched this scene unfold with a curious look. He was vaguely reminded of Linus and Lucy on a bad day, except Linus was never as deserving of what Roy Koopa was doing to Morton. Noticing that this argument might take some time, Charlie Brown began channelling light energy into his palms, hoping to take them both out in one strike. With the amount of light he'd charged up he might have, if Ludwig Koopa had not suddenly shot a magic bolt right into his palms, causing the attack to blow up in Charlie Brown's face.

Once again Charlie Brown fell to the ground, the resulting thud regaining Roy and Morton's attention. Charlie Brown groaned as Roy began shooting large spiked balls out of his own wand while Morton spat fireballs at him. Setting up a light shield, Charlie Brown began to stumble back under the weight of their attacks.

Back by the throne, Bowser and the other villains were quite enjoying the fight. Thibault in particular took the time to mock each of the heroes' performances and especially took delight in ridiculing Sally. While in their cage Peppermint Patty and Princess Peach watched in worry.

Unable to stand watching her friends get pounded while she could do nothing to help was becoming too much for Peppermint Patty. Grabbing onto the bars, Patty pulled her hardest to try and pull them apart and create gap. Naturally it didn't work.

"I can't believe this. Chuck, Snoopy and Woodstock and even Sally are down there fighting a squad of turtle monsters and I'm stuck in a cage. I should be helping them! Good Grief, why won't these bars break already!" Peppermint Patty yelled, straining herself to the point of exhaustion in her effort to escape. Princess Peach put two comforting hands on her shoulders in an effort to calm her down.

"I know it's frustrating sweetie, but there's no point stressing yourself out like this, it's not going to help anyone, least of all yourself. I would like to help too, but you've just got to have faith. It'll be ok, you'll see" Peach told the tomboy in a soothing voice. Peppermint Patty looked at her and sighed quietly, giving the bars one last kick.

"I guess you're right. Still... if only I had a hairpin or something" Peppermint Patty sighed. Princess Peach blinked at her in confusion.

"A... hairpin?" She questioned. Patty nodded in confirmation, and Peach raised an eyebrow "How would that help?"

"You can pick locks with them, my dad showed me how" Peppermint Patty explained. Peach's face lit up with surprise, which then turned to embarrassment.

"Wow... wish I'd known that years ago" She said to herself.

Peppermint Patty watched in confusion as Peach reached into her hair and pulled out a pink hairpin. She held it in front of Peppermint Patty's face, which widened into a smile.

"That'll do" She said. She then grabbed the hairpin and thrust it into the lock.

"This I going way too well" Eggman said, deciding to be the voice of cautious optimism among the villains. Joe Agate chortled at him.

"And that's a bad thing?" He asked.

"It is I you're a villain. Normally when a fight starts off in the bad guy's favour, the heroes suddenly make a comeback half way through and win out" Eggman responded. Thibault let out a laugh.

"Ha, yeah right. You're just saying that to be dramatic, there's no way they can get out of this mess. Right big guy?" Thibault said, referring to Bowser with the last comment. The Koopa king looked seriously down at his battling children and shook his head.

"Actually he's right, that is how it usually happens" Bowser replied. Thibault's eyes widened in surprise and he looked down cautiously at the action.

Back on the floor, Luigi was still avoiding attacks from Iggy Koopa, who was now just randomly shooting magic bolts about the place with no concern for where they struck. Suddenly skidding to a halt and turning around, Luigi decided to risk making a run for the mad koopaling. Iggy's attacks suddenly became much more focused as Luigi approached him. The younger Mario brother ducked, dodged and jumped over magic bolts, reaching Iggy Koopa and giving him a good right hook to the chin, sending him up in the air. Luigi then jumped up and kicked Iggy in the stomach, knocking him hard into the ground. Iggy Koopa rubbed his aching head, opening his eyes to find Luigi standing heroically over him. His mad eyes widened in shock for a second... but then the mischievous joy returned to them.

Leaping back a few feet, Iggy waved his wand about, and next second a creature resembling a large black ball with eyes and a mouth full of sharp teeth appeared, with a large chain sticking out it's rear like a tail, the end of which Iggy was holding onto. Luigi's eyes widened. Iggy grinned wickedly at Luigi, Waving at him before letting out a high pitched laugh and pointing at the plumber. The ball creature, called a Chomp-Chomp, barked like a dog and made a mad dash at Luigi, who let loose his trademark terrified scream and ran for it.

The Chomp-Chomp chased Luigi all around the room, barking loudly the whole time as Iggy Koopa laughed like a maniac. Screaming, Luigi continued to run, until he spotted a torch hanging from the wall, high enough to be out of the Chomp-Chomp's reach. Powered by adrenalin, Luigi jumped up with all his might, succeeding in grabbing the bottom end of the torch. The Chomp-Chomp came to a stop at the wall, looking up at Luigi and barking loudly. The horrid contraption tried to leap up and snatch him, Luigi tucked himself up out of the way, but the Chomp-Chomp still managed to take a chunk of his overalls, leaving a big gaping hole with his underwear exposed.

Turning around to see this, Luigi looked down and saw Iggy roll over with laughter at this humiliating display. The laughter rang in Luigi's ears, his eyes began to spiral and he let out a rage-filled scream.

"Alright, that DOES IT! I have had ENOUGH humiliation for one day!" Luigi yelled. Hanging from one hand by the torch, Luigi used his free hand to reach into his pockets and pull out the bag of power-ups. holding the bag with his teeth, Luigi reached in and pulled out what looked like a blue headed fire flower. The usual sound effects echoed, and Luigi's clothes turned blue and red. As Luigi stuffed the bag of power-ups back into his pocket, the Chomp-Chomp barked again and made another leap for Luigi, who used his free hand to throw a blue sphere into the creature's open mouth. The Chomp-Chomp was suddenly encased in a block of ice. The frozen Chomp-Chomp fell to the floor, shattering into thousands of tiny pieces.

Iggy bounced around the floor as his vicious pet fell apart. He tried to get up, but was struck by another ice ball hurled by Luigi, freezing him. Seizing this momentary advantage, Luigi dropped down and gave the ice-cubed Iggy a good kick into the wall. The ice around Iggy shattered and the kooky Koopaling fell off his face.

It took all the effort Iggy had just to stand after that. His teeth were chattering, his arms were folded and his whole body was shivering. The kid was freezing, made all the worse by the fact that he was cold blooded. Realizing Iggy couldn't attack or dodge him in this state, Luigi punched him in the face, then proceeded to deliver a brutal beat down to his tormentor, ending with him throwing Iggy by his tail into the wall. Falling on his face, Iggy Koopa was down for the count.

Luigi sighed in relief while wiping dust off his hands. He looked around at his struggling comrades, pulled out the power-up bag and took out a mushroom which looked like it's top was made of stone.

"Hey Mario, catch!" Luigi called, tossing the rock mushroom in his brother's direction. Mario, who was currently trying to shake Larry Koopa off his back as the mischievous youngster noogied him, saw the power-up headed his way and jumped up, grabbing the mushroom. Larry was sent flying off his back as the transformation occurred.

Mario stood in his Rock Mario form, which consisted of grey overalls and a cap made out of stone. Larry blinked a few times before gasping. He popped back into his shell and spun his way towards Mario, hoping to dispel the power up before the plumber could use it against him. With a grin, Mario easily jumped over Larry, flipped around and leapt up again, suddenly surrounding his body in a large boulder. Larry in his shell bounced off the wall and sped back in Mario's direction, while the boulder-ized Mario did the same thing. The shell and boulder collided with a sickening crunch. Boulder Mario kept rolling, while Larry was sent flying through the air, landing on his behind. The youngest koopaling shook his head around, he looked dizzy for a moment until Mario suddenly came up from behind and rolled over him, flattening the brat.

Back on the ice rink, Snoopy was using his highly adapted feet to skate around after Lemmy. The actual fighting between them seemed to be put on hold however, as both of their natural senses of

showmanship had taken over. So instead of trying to beat the holy hell out of each other, they were now engaged in a skate off.

Lemmy strolled casually along the ice, bending down before leaping up and doing a twirl in mid-air, landing on one foot with his hands outstretched. Snoopy stood back and watched with mild interest. Lemmy skidded to a stop and gestured Snoopy to make a move. Snoopy skated forward, making it to the other side of the rink before making a steady turn. After skating across the edge of the ice for a moment Snoopy moved back towards the centre, leaning back so that his head nearly touched the floor while still maintaining perfect balance. Snoopy then moved back into an upwards position and picked up speed, leaping up and spinning around like a tornado. He was still spinning as he landed, but stopped to take another jump and land on his ears. Then to Lemmy's surprise Snoopy proceeded to skate on his ears, performing several more tricks upside down before leaping back onto his feet, skidding to a halt before taking a bow.

Lemmy's jaw hit the floor, and a fire lit up in his eye. The clownish koopaling did NOT like being upstaged, and you can be sure he was NOT going to let Snoopy get away with being a better skater than him.

Snoopy continued to bow to his invisible audience, not paying any attention at all to reality until Lemmy skated by and tripped him up. Snoopy landed on his nose, the tip of which grew red and swollen. With a wince Snoopy held onto his nose, he looked over at Lemmy and saw the bully laugh at him in an annoying way. A frown forming on his face, Snoopy stormed to his feet, puffed up his chest impressively and made a mad dash at the Koopaling. Lemmy saw Snoopy coming and leapt over him, after landing he shot a fireball in Snoopy's direction. The white beagle changed course and skated around the fireball, speeding off towards Lemmy again. Ducking under a few more fireballs, Snoopy eventually surpassed Lemmy and began skating in circles around him. Lemmy followed Snoopy's progress exactly as Snoopy spun faster and faster around him. His eyes turned to spirals as Lemmy became dizzy, losing his grip on the ice and falling over.

Lemmy tried to get up and keep skating, but found himself unable to move. The spikes of his shell had become stuck in the ice, leaving him trapped.

After struggling for a while, Lemmy began to cry at his awkward predicament. Not far away Snoopy smiled and leapt for joy, continuing to skate peacefully across the ice as Lemmy struggled and squirmed.

"Yipe!"

Sally ducked once more under Wendy's ricocheting bracelets, then just barely sidestepped out of the way as it bounced off the wall and came darting back her way. Sally sighed with relief, not noticing until it was too late that Wendy O' Koopa had taken the time to sneak up behind her and kick her in the back. Sally rolled onto the floor, while Wendy laughed wickedly and pointed her glowing wand at the downed girl.

Yoshi's tongue suddenly shot forward and grasped onto the wand, pulling back on it so that the gem was facing Wendy's face when it

fired the magic bolt. Wendy went flying back a few feet, dropping her wand in the process. She landed not too far from where Yoshi was standing. The cutesy dinosaur stomped him feet impressively and shot his tongue out at Wendy, who grabbed it at the last second and yanked Yoshi forward with it, slugging the dinosaur hard in the face. Yoshi reeled from the attack, and Wendy tossed both her bracelets at him. The bracelets struck Yoshi hard, bouncing off the floor after they hit him to strike him again multiple times. When the bracelets finally returned to Wendy's arms the female Koopaling ran forward and struck Yoshi with a flying kick, following on with a fireball to the gut. The battered Yoshi collapsed on the ground in pain as Wendy stood impressively.

"That'll teach you to keep that slimy tongue 'a yours where it belongs, scaly mutt" Wendy sneered.

Sally had watched on in horror as Wendy delivered this brutal beat down to her dino buddy. Spotting Wendy's fallen wand a few feet in front of her, Sally gained a determined look and struggled forward. Grasping the wand in her right hand, Sally forced herself to her feet and aimed the wand for her enemy.

"Hey, Shell head! Leave my friend alone!" Sally yelled. Wendy, who had been about to give Yoshi a good kick to the stomach, stopped to look at Sally. She put her hands on her hips and laughed derisively.

"Ha, what you gonna do with that, turn me into a frog? You gotta practise before you can do magic girly, no way you can cast a spell on me" Wendy mocked Sally, who clenched her teeth.

"Oh yeah! Well-well-you're a turtle!" Sally said. Her failed attempt at a witty insult earned a round of laughter from Wendy, which put a downtrodden look on Sally's face. She waved the wand a few times in an effort to entice a reaction, but nothing worked. Scowling, Sally waved again and uttered "Um... Abra kadabra?"

To her great surprise the tip of the wand glowed bright purple, and several semi-translucent purple hands shot out of it. Wendy's laughter came to an abrupt halt as the hands formed into fists and began wailing upon her, beating the koopa girl into submission for a full minute before forming together into one big hand and pounding her into the ground.

The giant purple hand sunk back into the wand, the jewel of which glowed brightly for a moment and then went dim. Sally stared in shock and awe at the wand for a moment, then when she had time to comprehend what had just happened she smiled happily. Running over to check on Yoshi, who was starting at her with the same kind of bewilderment, Sally past by Wendy, who's body had sunk into the floor leaving her bruised head sticking out. Through a black eye Wendy looked up at Sally, who bent down and gave her a very self-satisfied grin.

"How did you know the super secret incantation?" Wendy asked weakly. Sally shrugged innocently.

"Simple-I'm smarter than you" Sally boasted, bonking Wendy's head with her own wand. Sally then carelessly tossed the wand across the room and went to check on Yoshi.

And as for Charlie Brown?

KABOOM

"Augh!" Charlie Brown went flying into the wall again as Ludwig Von Koopa set off a chain of explosions. Charlie Brown lifted his face, witnessing Roy send a trio of spiked balls rolling his way. With a groan, Charlie Brown flew over the balls and fired a light beam at Roy, who leapt back and avoided it. Charlie Brown panted a bit, hearing a battle cry from behind him he turned to find Morton Koopa falling towards him, about to strike Charlie Brown down with his hammer. Then out of nowhere, Sparky reappeared and flew right through Morton's head. The shock of this action was enough to make Morton drop his hammer. Morton landed on Charlie Brown, who held him up by the head, spun around and threw him down to earth. Morton bounced off the floor a few times before landing with a thud, looking like he'd really been hurt.

Sparky floated down next to Charlie Brown, who healed from his prior injuries and smiled gratefully at the spirit.

"Thank you. Where have you been?"

"Invisible. Now, I think it might be preferable to end this quickly before things get any more out of hand" Sparky said direly. Charlie Brown grimaced.

"But how? They're slaughtering me?" Charlie Brown groaned. Sparky put an intangible hand through his shoulder.

"First, stop worrying so much. And second, let your instincts fight for you. The Koopalings have an advantage only because they're sneaky and work well together while you focus too much on fighting just one of them at a time. Stop thinking too hard, let your guardian instincts guide you on this one" Sparky explained. After a short silence Charlie Brown nodded and floated down onto the floor, as the three strongest Koopalings surrounded him and jeered.

"Looks like the geek's giving up" Roy said, noticing how Charlie Brown just stood still and watched them. Morton laughed, preparing another one of his long rants before Ludwig slammed his mouth shut and spoke in his stead.

"Well then, let's accommodate the boy by bashing his face into the floor" Ludwig said, laughing evilly. Roy cracked his knuckles and smirked.

"Works for me" He said, taking a few steps towards Charlie Brown. He quickly picked up speed and charged at the guardian, fist held high ready to clobber. Charlie Brown took a deep breath and closed his eyes as the bully neared. Sparky watched closely as Roy brought his fist down and prepared to clobber Charlie Brown. He gritted his ghostly teeth apprehensively... then let out a sigh.

At the last second Charlie Brown had reached up and grabbed Roy's wrist, holding on so hard that he stopped the muscular Koopaling dead in his tracks. Roy's eyes widened beneath his glasses, he had but a split second to see Charlie Brown open his eyes before the boy picked him up, spun around and threw Roy straight into Morton Koopa. Ludwig

watched as his brothers fell into one another, putting on a frown he pointed his wand at Charlie Brown and fired a large blue magic bolt at him. With precision timing, Charlie Brown dodged the blast before disarming Ludwig with a light beam, launching another one at the Koopalings stomach while he was caught off guard, sending him into the pile with his two brothers.

The three Koopalings shook their heads, dazed by those last attacks. Charlie Brown smiled widely at his sudden progress, but forced himself to calm down. He always screwed up when he got too happy.

The Koopalings got back up and dusted themselves off, looking rather grumpy.

"What just happened, we had him on the run" Roy said irritably.

"It appear we've underestimated our bald, round headed opponent, yes we have. It would appear the kid has more fight in him than he let on, he's really quite strong. That means we better not underestimate him, no no, we must fight with everything we've got if we are to defeat this kid, yes sir"

"Morton, for crying out loud, can't you ever speak in short sentences?" Roy asked furiously.

"Talking too much is my trademark, I'd have less personality than junior if I didn't ramble all the time" Morton offered, in what was probably the least amount of words he'd spoken at on time in years. Ludwig rolled his eyes.

"Let's just get back to beating the Guardian up" The eldest boy said. His brothers nodded and charged at Charlie Brown, who stood still and ready, allowing his instincts to guide his every action.

Morton Koopa pulled out his big black hammer and swung it at Charlie Brown, who ducked backwards. Morton took several more swings at Charlie Brown, all of which the boy dodged with dexterity. Quickly growing irritated, Morton began swings about so hard he became a mini tornado. Charlie Brown only had to stand out of the way to avoid it while Morton wore himself out and fell on his behind. Charlie Brown immediately began channelling energy into both of his palms, unleashing it in one large beam that sent Morton crashing into the wall.

Charlie Brown had no time to relax, as next thing he knew Roy ran up from the side and lifted his fists. As he prepared to punch Charlie Brown, the guardian grabbed his fist and lifted him up, slamming Roy into the ground behind him. Roy stubbornly got back up and made to tackle Charlie Brown, who sidestepped out of the way. The bullying Koopa threw several more punches and a few kicks Charlie Brown's way, all of which were blocked. Roy stood back and prepared to shoulder tackle his foe, but Charlie Brown just leapfrogged over the Koopaling. As Roy skidded to a halt, Charlie Brown leapt forward and slugged him in the face. Not taking any chances, Charlie Brown followed up with several more light empowered punches to Roy's face and shell, following up with a strong light kick that threw Roy on his back.

Sensing something coming at him from behind, Charlie Brown flipped

around and set up a light shield, blocking a blue fire ball from Ludwig, who followed up with a barrage of magic bolts that Charlie Brown strained himself to block with his shield. Seizing his advantage, Ludwig retreated into his shell and thrust himself forward, smashing through Charlie Brown's light shield and knocking him down. With a mad cackle Ludwig poked out of his shell and threw a punch at Charlie Brown's face. Charlie Brown moved his head to avoid it and kicked Ludwig off of him. Ludwig fired another magic bolt as Charlie Brown got up, but the boy in the zigzag shirt dodged it and flashed a bright light into Ludwig's eyes. The koopa heir covered his burning eyes as he stumbled back, falling victim to a light beam to the stomach. With the last standing Koopalings on the end of his rope, Charlie Brown summoned two light spheres to his hands and tossed them at Ludwig, who managed to withstand the first one but collapsed after the second, too battered to fight. Charlie Brown sighed. A loud war cry from behind caught his attention as Morton Koopa came charging towards him, jumping up and raising his hammer. Charlie Brown sent him flying again with another light beam. When he landed Morton Koopa Jr was struck on the head by his own hammer, finally knocking him out cold.

Looking around at the three fallen Koopalings, Charlie Brown panted and gaped. Even with all the progress he'd made since getting his powers, it still amazed him that he was able to do anything quite like this.

Sparky hovered down and surveyed the area, giving Charlie Brown a kindly smile.

"And that's what happens when you keep calm and give it your best" Sparky said, making Charlie Brown smile.

Back by the throne, Bowser sighed lowly while Joe shrugged.

"Oh well, they gave it their best" Joe said nonchalantly, earning a raised eyebrow from Thibault.

"Why so calm, the kids screwed up. Ain't that a bad thing?" Thibault asked.

"Oh, we knew they were going to lose eventually. The Koopalings were just sent in to wear them out" Eggman explained, gesturing down at the heroes. Thibault looked closely, and saw that the heroes were indeed starting to pant and grow tired. The thought of this brought a smile to his face.

"Well, I guess it's our turn then" Bowser said, standing up and cracking his knuckles, as well as his back "Come on boys, lets give 'em heck!" He added, waving Joe and Eggman after him as he jumped right off the edge of the stairs.

As Mario and the others regrouped at the bottom steps Bowser came crashing down before them, the tremor created by his landing nearly blowing them away. As Mario tried to regain his footing Bowser rushed forward and backhanded him, sending the heroic plumber flying across the room. When he landed Mario's clothes returned to normal, losing the power up he'd gained. With a pained groan Mario looked up to see Bowser grin devilishly and stomp after him.

The other heroes were momentarily in shock from what had just

transpired. Before either of them could do anything to help Mario, Joe Agate suddenly swooped down and tackled Charlie Brown out of the way and into a wall. Shaking his head, Charlie Brown looked up to see Joe hovering over him with a smug scowl.

"Time for round two, Brown. And I gotta warn ya, I've got some more practise in while we were waiting for you" Joe boasted. Charlie Brown stared uncertainly up at him before his face formed into a concentrated frown. He lit up his hands and flew upwards, engaging Joe in a fist fight.

Glancing down at the rest of the heroes and sizing them up, Eggman pulled a remote control out of his jacket and pressed the large green button in the middle. A hatch opened up in the ceiling of the room and what looked like a round grey hovercraft floated down. Using various equipment lying around the castle, Eggman had constructed an exact duplicate of his Egg Mobile. With a few upgrades of course.

Hopping into the cockpit of his invention, Dr Eggman left Thibault standing by the throne and hovered down over Luigi, Sally, Yoshi, Snoopy and Woodstock, who watched in uncertainty as Eggman pushed a few buttons and pulled the lever to activate the Egg Mobile's battle mode. Legs sprung out the bottom of the device, a machine gun sprung out of the right side of the vehicle where a hand might be while a rocket launcher grew out the other side. The heroes gaped as Eggman grasped onto the controls and grinned wickedly.

"Oh ho ho ho ho, time for some fun!" Eggman said to himself. He aimed the rocket launcher at Luigi's head and let loose a number of missiles. With a nervous spasm, Luigi grabbed hold of Snoopy and Woodstock and ran to avoid the missiles while Yoshi flipped Sally onto his back and did the same thing. Dr Eggman chortled megalomaniacally as he steered the Egg Walker forward to pursue his targets. As all of this went on Kamek swooped down on his broom, floated over the unconscious bodies of Morton, Roy and Ludwig Von Koopa and shot rainbow coloured energy at them from his wand.

In the far corner of the room, Mario stood up and faced Bowser, who stopped a few feet away from him. The long time enemies exchanged heated glances before Mario spoke up.

"So, it's-a the old "Send in the Koopalings first and-a let them wear us out before fighting us yourself" Routine, huh? I admire the little tykes' spirits, but really, what makes-a you think it's going to work out any better than the last ninety eight times?" Mario questioned, not the least bit intimidated. Bowser breathed heavily and cackled.

"Because this time I've got reassurance" Bowser boasted, gesturing towards the battling Joe and Dr Eggman. Mario was hardly impressed.

"So have I" Mario said confidently, and Bowser laughed harder.

"Ha, yeah, your backup is a thirteen year old failure factory, a bratty half-pint, a hyperactive dog and a two ounce canary. Not what I'd call reassurance" Bowser chortled. Mario looked behind him at his friends scampering around while under attack. He looked Bowser in the face and shrugged.

"I've-a had less likely allies before, and it always works out fine" Mario said calmly. Bowser grinned devilishly and breathed fire from his nostrils.

"Well, I'm still gonna win this time. I'm feeling quite... confident"

Bowser made a run for Mario, who jumped up, bounced off his head and flipped over the koopa king. Bowser spun around and spat a fireball at Mario, who barrel rolled out of the way before leaping up and kicking Bowser in the chin. Bowser took a step back and rubbed his chin as Mario leapt back out of his reach. The flaming haired Koopa glared with the intensity of a forest fire as Mario assumed a fighting stance, ready for a full-on battle.

Up in the air, well above the rest of the fighters, Charlie Brown and Joe Agate were firing off light and dark beams at one another, neither quite landing a hit until Charlie Brown flew forward and grappled Joe.

"How'd you heal so fast?" Charlie Brown asked. Joe struggled a bit before managing to free himself from Charlie Brown's grasp and kicking his enemy in the stomach.

"Same way as you" Joe said plainly, aiming a dark fisted punch for Charlie Brown's head, which he blocked, along with several other strikes. Joe flew back a bit and added "Helps that the Witch was there to help speed up my recovery"

"And Freddie Fabulous, Melody Melody, everyone else you snatched up with you?" Charlie Brown inquired, readying some light spheres.

"Nice and safe in a plane of empty darkness. It was their choice to join me, they brought it on themselves. I never said they'd be living in luxury" Joe said snidely. Charlie Brown tossed two light spheres at him. Joe dodged the first and blocked the second with a dark shield, which he then dropped to fire a dark beam at Charlie Brown, striking the hero in the chest and sending him crashing into the wall. As Charlie Brown pulled himself out Joe flew forward and grabbed him by the throat.

"And don't worry, we're going to take good care of Peppermint Patty. And all your friends once we get a hold of them" He said with a wicked smile, which put a fearful look on Charlie Brown's face as he squirmed. Taking great pleasure in this, Joe leaned in and whispered into Charlie Brown's ear "I'm sure they'll make very obedient heartless..."

Joe had gone too far with that one. In a fit of protective rage, Charlie Brown screamed, summoning forth an aura of light so intense and blinding the force of it sent Joe flying halfway across the room. When Joe stopped he saw Charlie Brown stretching his hands out, then a barrage of white flames spewed out of his palms heading right for Agate.

Face-faulting, Joe summoned a protective sphere of darkness around himself, which was engulfed by the fires of light. The shield could only hold out for ten seconds before the white hot flames burned

through, by a miracle he was able to teleport out of the way before being incinerated, receiving only a few minor burns.

Joe took several short breaths, relieved to have gotten out of that one. He was promptly tackled by Charlie Brown, and the two of them became locked in aerial combat.

Back on the ground, Luigi, Snoopy and Woodstock were dodging bullets and rockets from Eggman's Egg walker. Luigi had briefly gained the upper hand at the start of the fight with his ice powers, but a stray bullet to the shoulder had lost him this ability, so right now it was all he could do to avoid Eggman's attacks and hope he ran out of ammo, while also keeping his attentions away from Sally and Yoshi, the latter of whom had taken the former to a safe distance on his urging.

Woodstock was having by far the easiest time staying alive, being only a few inches tall and not much of a threat Eggman's bullets were hitting nowhere near him, though he still had to run from the explosions of the rockets. Speaking of which, there was one heading for him right now.

"_III IIII!"_ Woodstock began to panic, running around in circles as he tried to decide which way was safe to run. The rocket got closer and began to lower down, and Woodstock covered his head, shaking in fear. He would have been doomed if Snoopy had not bravely ran over, picked him up and jumped out of the way. He narrowly avoided the blast range, but the shockwave still sent Snoopy flying across the room.

Luigi watched as Snoopy and Woodstock went flying, wincing as they splat into a wall. He would have gone to check on them, if he hadn't had to duck under a trio of bullets and leapfrog over a missile. All the while Doctor Eggman was laughing in that hammy manner of his, it felt oh so good to be able to blow stuff up again after so long.

As Eggman appeared to focus his attention on Luigi, Yoshi, with Sally riding on his back, managed to sneak up behind the Egg Walker. The two of them looked closely at the robot for anything they could strike at. An exhaust pipe, a battery pack, anything at all that looked like it might be important for keeping the machine running. What looked like a red box right below the cockpit caught Sally's attention, and she eagerly pointed this out to Yoshi. Yoshi put on a determined face and prepared to shoot out his tongue. Then all of a sudden the Egg Walker flipped around.

"Peekaboo!"

Yoshi and Sally's eyes widened as Eggman had the Egg Walker deliver a massive kick to the dinosaur. Yoshi and Sally landed in a heap on top of one another, and with Yoshi left momentarily too weak to move they became prime targets. Eggman aimed the machine gun carefully at Yoshi. With a few well aimed shots he could cripple the dinosaur without fatally injuring the girl. That would leave him with just Luigi and those two animals to concern himself with. A sinister smile upon his face, Eggman held the trigger and prepared to fire.

"Oh no you-a don't!" In a reckless but heroic act of bravery, Luigi jumped right onto the machine gun arm and began pulling at it. With his above average strength Luigi easily bent the barrel of the gun so

that it faced the side of the Egg Walker. The doctor was so taken by surprise at this development that he accidentally set the gun off, leaving several bullet holes in the side of his own vehicle. As Eggman panicked and tried to sort things out, Luigi jumped up and then ground pounded the base of the gun, snapping it right off of the Egg Walker. The sudden loss of limb caused said contraption to stumble about momentarily, and the machine gun was crushed under the foot of the Egg Walker as Luigi retreated to Sally and Yoshi's side.

Pulling himself together, Eggman surveyed the damage done to his vehicle. Luckily Luigi's attack only left the Egg Walker with minimum damage, though it did leave him with one less weapon to fight with.

"Not a problem. I've still got some tricks up my sleeve" The doctor reassured himself, flipping a few switches. A lazer cannon promptly rose out of the Egg Walker's chest.

"You sure you're alright Sally?" Luigi asked dotingly.

"I'm fine, seriously. You can stop asking" Sally said, for the sixth time in the last two minutes. Yoshi had recovered and was now steadily carrying her on his back again. Luigi sighed in relief and scratched the back of his head.

"Well, good to-a hear it. I'd never be able to-a look your brother in-a the eye again if-a anything happened to you on my watch" Luigi said. Sally suddenly remembered something important.

"Oh yeah, there's this red box with a black face on it on the back of his robot-walking-thingy. If all those movies with robots in them have taught me anything, that's bound to be pretty important" Sally explained urgently. Luigi questioned her wording, but still nodded thoughtfully.

"Could be. I'll look out for that" Luigi said. He felt someone patting him on the shoulder, and turned around to face Snoopy with Woodstock on his head "Oh, hiya Snoopy. When'd you get back?"

Instead of giving an answer (Not like Luigi would understand it), Snoopy pointed to the Egg Walker, which was charging up a lazer to fire at the group. Floating momentarily off the ground in fear, the heroes scattered as Eggman began firing multiple lazer beams their way.

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Back up in the cage, Peppermint Patty had finally succeeded in picking the lock. Princess Peach had the girl hold on to her as she leapt down. Peach's dress suddenly spread out and acted as a sort of parachute, slowing down their fall so that they landed safely. Thibault saw this and ran down the steps from the throne to intercept them.

"Wow, I'm not one for dresses, but that's a pretty handy one you've got there" Peppermint Patty complimented as the duo landed "But aren't you afraid of someone looking up at you when you're floating down like that?"

"That's why I wear white shorts underneath" Peach said with a giggle. Peppermint Patty smiled and looked over the battlefield. On one side, Mario was jumping around Bowser, occasionally delivering a kick to the koopa king's face until Bowser threw a fit and caught him mid jump, proceeding to toss Mario into a wall. Mario quickly jumped back up and continued his attack as though almost nothing had happened, though she noticed he did seem slower. Peppermint Patty turned her head upwards to check in on Charlie Brown. Her pal Chuck was currently blocking a barrage of dark spheres from that jerk Agate, who eventually dispensed with this routine and shot forward. Charlie Brown dropped his shield and began trading blows with Joe, who eventually landed a kick to his knee. As Chuck clutched his knee Joe grabbed his head and tossed him about. Peppermint Patty growled at the bully for that one.

Peppermint Patty then looked down at Eggman firing lazer beams all over the place, landing at least one lucky hit to Luigi and knocking him down. She could hear the evil scientist laughing victoriously as he aimed the rocket launcher at the fallen plumber. He was then momentarily distracted as Snoopy began throwing rocks at the side of the Egg Walker, probably fallen rubble from Charlie Brown and Joe's fighting, or from the countless times everyone had been thrown against the walls the past twenty minutes. Woodstock was too weak to throw the rocks so just held some up for Snoopy to grab, though Sally and Yoshi joined in, Sally even stuck out her tongue and yelled insults at the scientist. Peppermint Patty had to give Sally credit for her audacity, but in hindsight it was a pretty stupid thing to do, because now Eggman was aiming more of his attacks at her.

A determined look showed up on Patty's face.

"Alright, that's enough spectating, time to get involved" Peppermint Patty said, rolling up her sleeves and getting ready to march up to the battle field, when Thibault suddenly blocked her path.

"Where do you think you're going, butch?" Thibault said rudely, angering Peppermint Patty.

"Out of my way you little blockhead, I don't have time for you. I have actually important things to worry about" She said in a dangerous voice, trying to push her way through the short bully, but Thibault stood his ground.

"I don't think so, tomboy. You and the royal wench can get back in the cage" Thibault demanded. If he had not already gotten Peppermint Patty riled up, then his insult of Princess Peach certainly did the trick.

"You better apologise for that insult right now, or I'll slug you right back to our world!" Peppermint Patty threatened, raising her fist. Thibault laughed.

"Like you could, I'd just kick your butt. Everyone knows men are stronger than girls. Why do you think most insults about fighting are related to your gender" Thibault spat. Peppermint Patty gave him a bemused look.

"This after I completely demolished you just yesterday?" Peppermint Patty said irritably. Thibault shrugged carelessly.

"You got lucky. I've been working out since then. Now for the last time, get back in your cage or you'll get the back of my hand" Thibault said. He was promptly knocked out in one punch from Patty.

"He was quite rude, wasn't he" Princess Peach said quietly, earning a nod from Patty.

"Yeah, he may not be the toughest bully, but he's by far the most obnoxious. I don't know why I ever let him on my baseball team" Peppermint Patty said offhandedly. She glanced over the battle field then back to Peach "Just stay back where it's safe princess, I'm going to see if Chuck and them need my help"

"You really shouldn't Patty, you could get killed" Peach tried to warn the girl, but Patty just shook her head and walked forward.

"Like that's going to stop me. No one who messes with my friends can expect to not mess with me too. I'll be fine" Was all Peppermint Patty said before running off to fight. Princess Peach tried to chase after her, but was forced to leap back to avoid a dark beam crashing into the ground before her. With a regretful sigh Peach retreated to a safe corner.

"Sally, duck!"

Heading Luigi's warning, Sally just managed to avoid a lazer beam to the head. Running out of small chunks to hurl at the Egg Walker she retreated behind an especially large piece of rubble along with Woodstock. But Eggman was not interested in her right now, instead he was aiming for his two actual threats, Luigi and Yoshi.

Yoshi, with Snoopy riding on his back wearing a cow boy hat he'd apparently pulled from thin air, made a run for the Egg Walker, dodging under several lazars and a missile before jumping high into the air, stomping onto the glass dome shielding the mad doctor. The class promptly cracked, and while Eggman managed to shake the dinosaur off, Snoopy jumped off at the last second and, mimicking what he'd seen from Mario and Luigi, performed a ground pound on the glass, smashing right through it and right in front of Eggman. Snoopy held both of his hands up as though he were holding two imaginary guns at Eggman.

"I'm the world famous sheriff, and yer under arrest"_ Snoopy thought at him. Eggman just looked confused and swiped at the pooch.

"Get off of my controls you crazy hound!" Eggman complained, swinging his fist at Snoopy, who ducked and bit onto his arm. Eggman howled in agony and shook Snoopy around, the beagle let go only to pounce on Eggman, getting into a scuffle with him in the process. As they thought the two of them ended up slamming numerous buttons and switches, causing the lazer cannon and rocket launcher to fire off wildly, and even caused several other weapons like a grenade launcher and a cannon that shot sharp metal spikes to emerge.

Luigi and Yoshi watched on cautiously as the Egg Walker went nuts, occasionally having to dodge the random attacks it was firing off.

"If I weren't-a scared to go near that darn thing right now I'd-a run up to it myself and-a help Snoopy beat the guy up. You think the little scamp stands a chance?" Luigi asked. Yoshi shrugged innocently "Hmm... well, you never know. Hope Snoopy comes out of it alright anyway"

"Ah, ol' Snoop'll be fine. He can take Lucille in a fight, so old Egghead should be a piece of cake" Luigi and Yoshi turned around to see Peppermint Patty standing beside them.

"Oh hey, you're-a free" Luigi said pleasantly, looking over her to see Princess Peach in the distance "How-?"

"Picked the lock" Peppermint Patty explained, looking over at the out of control Egg Walker and then back at Luigi "So, how can I help?"

Luigi and Yoshi looked confused.

"Excuse-a me?" Luigi asked.

"How can I help?" Peppermint Patty asked again. Picking up on his confusion she added "With the fight. What can I do to help out?"

Luigi blinked in surprise "Oh... what? No, I think it would-a be best if you-a stayed with the princess where it's-a safe" Patty shook her head.

"What, and miss out on all the action? No, I want to help and I'm going to help" Peppermint Patty said determinedly. Luigi and Yoshi exchanged worried looks.

"Um, you do realise that this is a dangerous situation and you're-a likely to get killed if you get involved, right? We came all-a this way to rescue you and-a the Princess, it would-a be devastating to Charlie Brown if-a anything happened to you" Luigi tried to sound convincing, but Peppermint Patty was looking anything but convinced.

"Forget it Luigi, it's not going to work" Luigi looked to Sally, who had emerged from her safe zone behind the rubble to address him "Peppermint Patty is the most stubborn person in Birchwood after Lucy, when she wants to do something, no matter how crazy or dangerous or plain old stupid it is, she'll do it, no matter what you tell her. She's a lot tougher than she looks too, she's good at just about everything involving physical activity-she stinks at school though, even my grades are better-but she can handle this. And if you try saying no she'll go ahead and get involved anyway"

Luigi hummed thoughtfully, looking over Peppermint Patty, who was actually smiling in anticipation of getting involved in the fighting. With a defeated sigh, he conceded "Well, ok then. But-a you'll need one of these" Luigi pulled out the bag of power ups, reaching in and pulling out a fire flower that he handed to Peppermint Patty, who stared uncertainly at it until it vanished in her hands and turned her shirt white with red stripes and her shorts all red. She looked herself over with amazement.

"Whoa, how'd you do that?" Peppermint Patty asked ecstatically.

"Power-ups tend to-a change your clothes. That-a fire flower also gives you the power to-a shoot fireballs from your hands" Luigi replied. Looking positively thrilled by the thought of it, Peppermint Patty held out her palm, concentrated hard and generated a baseball sized sphere of flames, letting out an excited exclamation when she did so.

"Wow, this is so cool!" Peppermint Patty cheered, juggling the fireball between her hands "Hey, how come we don't have anything this cool on my world? What a jip!"

Luigi watched with some amusement as Peppermint Patty played around with her new powers like a child being given a new toy for their birthday. An explosion sounding off behind him brought him back to reality, and he turned to see the Egg Walker still spiralling around, though this time all of it's weapons seemed to be firing off in the opposite direction from him and the others. Looking carefully, Luigi spotted what was probably the red box Sally had mentioned to him on the back of the Egg Walker. Luigi knew what he had to do.

"Alright then, who do you want me to blast first?" Luigi was brought out of his thoughts by Peppermint Patty, who was holding fireballs in two hands and looking ready for action. Luigi glanced back at the Egg Walker, sweat dropping as he looked at the eager tomboy.

"Um, well..." Luigi began, still not sure if he should really get her involved. By chance he glanced over to where his brother and Bowser were fighting. Mario ducked under a swipe from Bowser's claws and slid between his legs, grabbing Bowser by the tail and spinning him about before tossing the koopa king into a wall. A light bulb went off above his head.

"Well, I think I-a know how to beat this robot, so why don't you-a go help Mario. Bowser seems to have a weakness to fire... which is odd, because he-a breathes the stuff and-a lives in a castle full of many pits of lava" Luigi mused. Peppermint Patty looked over to Bowser and Mario's position then turned back to Luigi with a salute.

"Aye-aye, chief!" Peppermint Patty said before running off. Luigi blinked.

"Chief?" Luigi said, smiling a little while looking at Yoshi "Nobodies ever called me that before... I like it, it-a makes me feel kinda important"

Yoshi stared blankly at him and pointed to the Egg Walker, which caused Luigi to do a double take as he remembered the task at hand.

"Oh, right. Watch Sally and Woodstock a minute Yoshi, I'm-a going to end this" He said, making his way to the Egg Walker while it's weapons were still firing away from him.

Bowser lifted himself up from the ground and looked back at Mario, who was crouching back into his general fighting position and motioning Bowser forward. With a growl, Bowser ran forth to strike Mario. The heroic plumber leapt over Bowser, who skidded to a halt

and turned around, breathing fire at Mario. Mario barrel rolled to the left out of the way, but was still struck by a tail swipe from Bowser. After getting up, Mario dodged several more swipes from Bowser's claws and leapt back to a safe distance.

"You're a tough guy Bowser, I'll-a give you that" Mario said, jumping over another tail swipe "After all these years, and despite all the people I've-a fought, you're-a still arguably the toughest enemy I ever had. I won't lie, I actually admire your-a persistence" He dodged to the left to avoid a fire ball "It's actually one of-a the things I enjoy most about life, fighting you. Luigi would rather have a permanent vacation, but me? I honestly would-a get bored in a fortnight" Mario ducked under a punch "As much as we hate each other, I think we both-a have a great deal of respect for one another. We-a can't live without fighting each other. So I don't care that you kidnapped the princess, or-a Charlie Brown's friend. I'm glad you did, we've-a had so much fun on the way"

Mario dodged several more strikes from the Koopa king before punching him in the jaw, then leaping up and landing on his head, kicking off and jumping behind him. Bowser turned around as Mario continued his speech, now looking far more serious.

"But what does concern me is-a teaming up with these-a new bad guys. You know what they're-a going to do to the universe. I know you're not that evil. You're-a mean, spiteful, prone to anger and grouchy, but you're-a anything but pure evil at heart. You're just moderately evil. So why... why help these people turn-a the universe into a wasteland?" Mario asked earnestly. Bowser stood still for a moment, staring silently at Mario while contemplating his answer. He sighed heavily.

"Mario, how long have we been enemies?" Bowser asked plainly. Mario took a while to think of an answer.

"Almost twenty nine years maybe? I dunno, I-a lost count" Mario replied unsurely.

"And in all these years we've been fighting each other, how much have I accomplished?" Bowser asked. Mario shifted awkwardly, avoiding eye contact.

"Uhh, well... you, um... there was that one time when... ummmm? But you did-oh, no, that was Cackletta. But there was that time you... oh no, that was-a me. Uhhhhhh... I-a don't know" Mario sighed.

"Exactly" Bowser said, quite miserably "After all these years of fighting, you're the most respected, beloved guy on the planet, hailed in every corner of the world, and even in space. You're the most famous guy who ever lived. But me? Am I famous? Yes... for being a joke!"

"You know, back before we first met, the Koopa empire was well respected for their ruthlessness and strong leadership. It didn't matter that our kingdom was a dump, we proved ourselves fearsome warriors, we were known across the world as a deadly force that no one in their right minds would dare to cross. So when I took the crown, my goal was to take that to the next level" Bowser began pacing around Mario, the two of them maintaining eye contact the

whole time "I wanted to prove myself the greatest Koopa King of all time, by conquering all the other kingdoms, making Darkland the capital of the world!

"I could have started my campaign in many other kingdoms, I could have went to war with the Bean Kingdom or Grass Land. You know why I went with the Mushroom Kingdom instead? Well, it wasn't the biggest kingdom, but it wasn't the smallest, and while it's army was weak the kingdom still had a lot of resources we could use to further our conquest. It was a simple enough plan, and I thought it would work. We were the Koopas, the most powerful army in the known world, going up against a kingdom of cowardly Toads. Even if my long term goal of world domination didn't work out, if I could still conquer this and a few other kingdoms, it would still be a huge win for my empire. We'd be ruling more land than we'd had in centuries, our people would have better places to live than in some dark dead plains and haunted castles, and I'd be leaving my heirs in a position where they could continue my work, until the whole world bowed to the Koopas. I would leave behind a legacy as the greatest Koopa who ever lived..."

Bowser came to a stop, glaring intensely at Mario "... And then you showed up" He breathed heavily "After kidnapping the princess and her whole court, I practically had the Mushroom Kingdom in my hand. Then all of a sudden you showed up and started running and jumping your way through my army. At first I thought you were a nuisance, but then you didn't just hand my entire army their shells, but you even beat me in battle and sent us packing! I couldn't believe it! My grand attempt at taking over a kingdom was foiled-by a plumber!

"At first I tried to shrug it off-ok, so things didn't work out the first time around, that's fine. I just needed time to rethink my strategy, that's all. I took some time to rally my army, and set out to conquer several other kingdoms instead. Sending my kids out to lead my forces, we actually hit the jackpot and conquered SEVEN whole kingdoms. I was on top of the world, with seven kingdoms under my belt, surely the rest of the world would soon fall too. Then what happens? You show up and save the day again! And again, and again, and AGAIN! for the next few years, no matter what I tried, you always somehow managed to beat me. And with every defeat, my empire lost more and more respect. Where once I was feared, I became the subject of ridicule and crude jokes. Now instead of the most feared army in the world, the koopas are a cautionary tale for villains everywhere!"

Bowser took a deep breath and began panting heavily, trying very hard to contain his rage. He narrowed his eyes at Mario and groaned with jealousy.

"You-you've really benefitted from humiliating me. Like I said, the whole world knows who you are, and they love you. Worship you, even. You'll be remembered for all time as the greatest hero who ever lived, the guy who rose up from obscurity to save the world time and time again. That's your legacy. Mine? My legacy is being the guy you beat up to gain that fame. History won't remember me as a great king, but as a second rate loser who failed at everything he ever tried and got his ass handed to him every single time he fought the great and perfect Mario. It doesn't matter that I put up a good fight, it doesn't matter that I never gave up and always did my best. People don't care about that stuff. All people will think about is what a

failure I was. If I never beat you, then the only thing I'll be remembered as is the guy who always lost to Mario, and the king who turned the Koopas into a laughing stock. It's a good thing my father isn't alive to see what I've become, he'd be ashamed of me"

Bowser almost collapsed onto his knees in frustration when he was finished. He looked at the ground, his face filled with sorrow and regret, the effect was so upsetting that Mario couldn't help but feel a deep sympathy for his enemy. Despite all the horrible things he'd done, it was impossible not to feel sorry for Bowser at that moment for how just plain sad he looked.

With what looked like a great deal of difficulty, Bowser lifted his head back up to look at Mario and say "It hurts, Mario. It really hurts. The only comfort is, deep down, I kinda liked fighting with you. For all the grief I go through every time I lose to you, it gives me purpose... after losing to you so many times, I became more and more determined to beat you, and I learned a lot. I'm a lot stronger and smarter than I was before, and I've learned a lot more about leadership and conquest, skills I could use to really take over if I ever did beat you. You're right, I do respect you. Heck, on a good day I even kinda like you. I mean, who couldn't. For a squat middle aged plumber you're a worthy opponent and the ultimate nice guy, it's impossible not to like you to so extent. It's probably the only thing keeping me sane through all this failure"

"But now I'm sick of it!" Bowser breathed a great deal of fire as he screamed this, Mario had to duck to save his face "A guy can only put up with so much, and I'm not getting any younger. I'm a koopa, we live long lives, but the only reason I'm alive after all the times you've pummelled me, burned me, thrown me into bombs and pits of lava and everything is because Kamek keeps healing me. And he's pushing two hundred, he's not gonna be around for more than another decade or two. And you ain't no koopa, eventually something's gonna kill you, and if it's not me... then I really don't see the point in going on. I mean, yeah, without you around, taking over the world would be a piece of cake. But it would all feel so hollow if I never beat you. We've been at it too long now for me to just move on with my life, as things stand taking over the world means nothing if I didn't defeat you to do it.

"And THAT'S why I'm teaming up with these people" Bowser growled "I've seen what they can do, and it might just work... more than anything else I've done, teaming up with this Dark Empire sounds like my best, and maybe last real chance to get what I want. And if it means I get a real shot at beating you, I'm willing to do anything to get it"

Mario glared accusingly at Bowser "Even helping an insane goddess of darkness lobotomise the entire universe and shroud everything in eternal darkness?!"

"I live in darkness already, that doesn't bother me. And hey, half the world's out there are so full of crap with the way people act that turning them into shadows is probably being merciful" Bowser shrugged nonchalantly, earning a half disgusted, half disappointed shake of the head from Mario "And anyway, I have a few plans to work my way around it. Part of my terms for working with these people is that the koopas and other races living in Darkland get to stay the way they are, as well as Princess Peach. I'll even let you stay

human... you'll be locked up for the rest of your life in my dungeon and kept as a trophy and a living monument to how I finally beat you, but hey, you'll still be alive. Can't argue with that, right. I'll have everything my heart desires, and above all, I'll have a legacy. I'll be remembered as the king who helped to conquer not just the world, but the entire UNIVERSE! I'll be the king whose persistence and determination allowed the koopas to finally take their place as the rulers of the Mushroom World! And if everyone else has to get turned into heartless to accomplish that, so be it"

Mario stared wistfully at Bowser for a while after this speech. But he remained determined, he wasn't going to give up so quickly.

"I understand you want to-a think about the future, Bowser. But if the Dark Empire gets away with-a what they're doing, the universe won't have a future. Is your legacy worth that?!" Mario spat, catching Bowser off guard with his accusing tone "Come on Bowser, you're not-never have been that heartless! There are-a better ways of making a good name for-a yourself and-a your kingdom than enslaving the universe! End this Bowser, let us drive these creeps out of-a your castle and out of-a our world"

Bowser snorted at Mario "Are you really that stupid that you're asking me to not join forces with the Dark Empire" He asked. He was not prepared for Mario's answer.

"I'm-a asking you to-a help us stop them" Mario said sincerely. Bowser did a double take and threw him a questionable look "We've-a teamed up against bigger foes before, let's-a do it again! Put aside our differences for a little while so we can all-a save the universe together! Help us now, and when we succeed at-a stopping the empire-and we will, deep down you know we will-we can-a go back to the way things are. And you can-a be remembered, not as the king who helped plot the universe's downfall, but as the king who-a put his own selfish desires aside and gave his aid when it really mattered. The king who, despite all the evil things he'd done, was still noble enough to do the right thing. Who like any good ruler, proved his dedication to his country and his world by saving it from tyranny. _That_ can be your legacy!"

Mario extended the hand of friendship to Bowser, who looked down at it with a contemplative expression, then looked Mario in the eye. Mario smiled "What do you say?"

For what felt like hours, there was silence. The look on the koopa king's face was almost impossible for most people to distinguish any expression from, but Mario knew Bowser well enough to know there was much thought going through his head. Eventually Bowser let out a sigh.

"I'd say thanks, but no thanks"

Mario didn't even have time to register what had been said before Bowser delivered a nose breaking punch to his face. Mario groaned on the ground and tried to get up, and then screamed in agony as Bowser pinned him down hard with his foot.

"_That_ was your argument? Honestly, I'd been expecting better" Bowser said, shaking his head as Mario squirmed below him "I don't want to be remembered as a good guy, I want to be remembered as the

guy who got the job done! Maybe I'm not as evil as I'd like people to think, but I'm also not as good as you're telling yourself I am. After twenty eight years I'd think you'd know better"

Mario grabbed hold of the sides of Bowser foot and began pushing it off, having some success until Bowser forced his foot back down and pinned him again.

"I don't care what happens to the rest of the universe, alright. It's not my problem, my concerns are myself, my family and my kingdom. Nothing else matters right now except beating you and securing koopas domination. So I'm sorry to disappoint, but nothing you say will convince me to turn the Dark Empire down. Now, hold still and let me finally have my long awaited, well deserved moment of triumph!" Bowser held Mario down carefully and raised his fist. Mario struggled desperately to get free, while his enemy smiled wickedly as he prepared to strike. Mario closed his eyes and braced for impact...

"AUGH!"

Mario's eyes popped back open swiftly. A pair of fireballs had been thrown right into Bowser's face. Covering his eyes and growling in pain and confused anger, Bowser backed away, allowing Mario to catch his breath and jump back onto his feet. Mario looked behind himself to meet his rescuer, spotting Peppermint Patty holding two more fireballs in her hands. She grinned.

"Hiya, I'm Peppermint Patty, and I'm here to help you. Sorry it took me so long to get here, the floor between us was made of ice for some reason and I had to walk around it" Patty explained, pointing towards the ice rink Lemmy had created earlier. She glanced down at the fire balls in her hands and awkwardly added "Of course, now that I think about it, it probably would've been easier to just melt my way through it. Oh well, live and learn, right?"

Mario blinked a few times, but then smiled at her. Not the sort of back-up he'd been expecting, but he wasn't one to judge.

"It's-a nice to meet you Patty" Mario greeted. He heard a groan from behind him and turned around.

Bowser was wiping his eyes, his face only slightly burned from the fire balls. He glanced down at Mario and Peppermint Patty, who stood in fighting positions. He looked confused.

"That was you that attacked me? Not very fitting behaviour of a princess" Bowser commented. He was immediately struck in the face by two more fireballs.

"I'm no princess!" Peppermint Patty yelled. Bowser rubbed his face and growled, but before he could make a move he was pelted with a whole barrage of fireballs from the ticked off tomboy, each one perfectly pitched to strike at a tender spot. Bowser covered himself and stood back, too surprised by Patty's audacity he wasn't sure how to react. Mario stared at Peppermint Patty for a moment, impressed by her quick mastery of her new fire powers. Seizing the opportunity she'd opened up Mario ran forth, running up Bowser's back and performing a ground pound on his head, being careful to avoid the horns. Bowser let out a muffled scream of pain and nearly toppled

over.

A scowl appeared on Bowser's face and he made to swat Mario off, but Mario spared him the trouble and flipped off his head, landing behind him. Bowser turned around and made to grab him, only for Mario to slide between his legs. Bowser made to get up, only to receive a swift uppercut from Peppermint Patty. Of course she wasn't strong enough to hurt him, but she added a fireball to the punch, which burnt his lower jaw. As Bowser rubbed his burns Peppermint Patty followed up by launching a fireball into his shell-covered belly. Bowser inched back and clutched his stomach, glaring a death glare at Patty and raising his fist to slap her... then lowering it, looking awkward. After a moment's hesitation he motioned like he was going to grab her, but stopped halfway through, looking even more awkward. He sighed lowly.

"Aw, who am I kidding, I can't fight you. For one thing you're a girl, and second you're just a kid. I could probably overlook the first one, but I'd feel like a monster hitting a kid" Bowser complained. Peppermint Patty huffed.

"Now that's just discrimination" Peppermint Patty complained.

"Actually, it's more like me having standards. Even us villains gotta have them, otherwise we're just plain evil" Bowser said reasonably. Peppermint Patty shrugged, pausing for a moment to ponder the absurdity of having this discussion with a ten foot turtle monster.

"Oh well, I guess it just makes it easier for me then" Peppermint Patty added, forming two large fireballs... then Bowser grabbed her arms and held her up by them, grinning smugly.

"I said I can't fight you, I didn't say I couldn't throw you back in your cage or something" Bowser told her. Peppermint Patty groaned as Bowser grinned in self satisfaction, which was wiped clean off his face as he was suddenly yanked backwards, dropping Patty in the process. From behind Mario had grabbed Bowser by the tail, dragging him to a safe distance to swing him around and throw him face first into the wall. Mario and Patty grinned at each another, looking over to see Bowser shake off his crash and push himself up. Nodding to one another, Mario charged towards his foe while Peppermint Patty prepared more fireballs.

Up in the air Charlie Brown and Joe Agate were still exchanging punches and kicks. Charlie Brown shot a light beam for Joe's face, which the dark boy ducked under and prepared to wallop his face. Charlie Brown grabbed his fist and aimed for Joe's throat, which Joe blocked with his free arm before kicking Charlie Brown several feet away with a swift dark kick. The two enemies prepared to fire more beams at one another when Charlie Brown noticed a random missile heading straight for them. With a shocked exclamation Charlie Brown surrounded himself with a light shield. Joe noticed the oncoming threat just in time to summon his own dark shield. The smoke produced from the blast obscured the two of them for a moment, when it cleared Charlie Brown looked down to find the source of the missile, the still out of control Egg Walker. He thought for a moment about flying down to pull the plug on it, but a dark sphere to the chest sent him crashing into the floor on the other side of the room.

Inside the Egg Walker, Snoopy was putting up a hell of a fight against Doctor Eggman. He was using his talent for fantasising to his advantage. Right now he was wrapping his body around the bad Doctor's neck like a snake, narrating in his mind as he did so.

"Here's the mighty Boa Constrictor, wrapping his body around his prey. Using it's mighty coils, the Constrictor squeezes the life out of it's hapless victim"

Doctor Eggman's face turned an ugly shade of purple as Snoopy effectively squeezed the life out of him. He tried to pull the beagle off, but Snoopy was far too into the moment to let go. Desperately in need of air, Eggman began banging his fist against Snoopy's head. He succeeded in forcing Snoopy to uncoil. Taking a deep, gasping breath, Eggman grabbed Snoopy by the throat and held him up, glaring at him under his glasses. Snoopy bit his wrist, Eggman released him as he swung his hand about, yelping furiously. He became more agitated as Snoopy jumped onto the side of his head and began banging his nose against the bald centre of his skull.

"Here's the woodpecker, doing as his name implies and pecking against the tree to make his nest within" Snoopy narrated, banging harder. Eggman continued to thrash about the whole time, banging more buttons and causing more of his weapons to be unintentionally fired in the process.

Weapons which fired almost directly upon Luigi.

Ducking under a trio of lasers and jumping out of the way of an exploding missile, Luigi finally managed to reach the Egg Walker, latching onto it's side. Holding on tight to avoid being thrown off as the mechanized walker swung about wildly, Luigi climbed across and reached the red box, which he noticed had several wires running from the sides. Had to be for something then. Unable to reach into his pockets for a power up due to the strain he was under trying to hold onto the Egg Walker, Luigi reached out one hand and grabbed onto the box. He scrunched up his face, remembering everything those two jellyfish woman from the Bean Bean Kingdom had taught him and channelling lightning into his palm. The electricity he produced was absorbed into the red box, which began steaming before short circuiting and causing a small explosion, which burnt Luigi's hand of course.

The effect was almost immediate. As the red box on it's back blew a fuse, the Egg Walker came to a sudden stop, standing unsteadily on one foot for a moment before collapsing onto it's side. Inside the Egg Walker, Dr Eggman and Snoopy groaned in pain, getting up and rubbing their heads.

"What... what just happened?" Eggman wondered. Snoopy's head swung about dizzily for a moment before he shook it off, jumped onto Eggman's head and propelled himself out of the cockpit, meeting Luigi outside.

The green clad plumber patted Snoopy on the head in congratulation "Good boy. Sure was lucky I just conveniently remembered I could shoot lightning from my hands at that moment, wasn't it?"

Noticing the battle seemed to be over, Sally, Woodstock and Yoshi

came out from their hiding place and ran over to re-join their friends, overlooking the wreckage as they drew near. Sally whistled impressively.

"Not bad. Not bad at all" Sally complimented. There was a sudden crashing sound as Dr Eggman tore his way out of his toppled creation, carrying a pair of red guns he'd removed from a compartment within the Walker and aiming them at the heroes, an exasperated frown on his face.

"Alright, so maybe my Egg Walker 2.0 wasn't up to scratch, but I'm not going to be beaten that easily. I'm the worlds greatest super genius after now. Now put your hands in the air or I'll open fire" Eggman threatened. Instead of complying Yoshi shot out his tongue and yanked the right gun out of Eggman's hand, making him stumble forward as Luigi jumped up and kicked him in the face. Eggman went flying back into the Egg Walker, dropping the other gun as he was knocked down, not quite unconscious but too weak to stand. Luigi sighed in relief.

"And that's the end of that" Luigi said, wiping his hands impressively as the rest of his little group smiled pleasantly... then gaped in horror as Luigi was struck down from behind by twin blasts of magical energy.

With a painful splutter, Luigi looked up to see Ludwig and Roy Koopa standing nearby, laughing wickedly as they pointed their wands at him. Luigi stared in shock.

"Wha-wait, weren't you both just unconscious?" Luigi spluttered. Ludwig pointed over to where Lemmy Koopa had fallen earlier. Kamek was currently lifting him out of the ice and healing any injuries he had. Lemmy smiled and waved at the magikoopa before dancing off across the slowly melting ice rink. Luigi sighed.

"Typical" The plumber muttered, being struck once more in the stomach by one of Ludwig's magic bolts. The eldest Koopaling laughed maniacally as he charged at Luigi, while Roy began attacking the others, who took off in a run.

"Hold still, dang it!"

Bowser's roars became all the more impatient as Mario and Peppermint Patty nimbly avoided every one of his attacks, all the while landing their own hits. Bowser swung his claws at Mario, he jumped onto and ran up his arm to deliver a kick to the koopa's face, jumping off afterwards. Bowser then tried to swat the oncoming Peppermint Patty away with a tail swipe, she leapt over it and launched a fireball right into his face as he spun round. While Bowser stumbled back Mario leapt up again and prepared to stomp Bowser in the face. This time the koopa king had a bit more luck and grabbed the plumbers foot, smashing him against the ground twice before hurling him up into the air. With a nasty smile, Bowser then looked down and spat several oversized fireballs at Peppermint Patty, who barrel rolled out of the way. Unfortunately she tripped up and landed on her face, leaving her open for Bowser to raise his fist and aim an attack at her. She was spared when Mario suddenly landed on Bowser's head and began punching his face.

Bowser stumbled about as he tried to pull Mario down. Peppermint

Patty recovered and began forming an especially large fireball between both hands. Bowser finally managed to grab Mario, holding him in front of his face by the scruff of his neck. Mario waved sheepishly as the Koopa king raised his fist to sock him... only to have a super sized fireball thrown by Peppermint Patty strike him in the face. Mario landed on the ground as Bowser stumbled back, that last hit leaving him kinda woozy. Mario ran back a few feet and charged forward once more, landing a flying kick to Bowser's head. After wobbling a bit, Bowser fell to the floor, seemingly losing consciousness.

Mario and Peppermint Patty waited a moment to see that Bowser was truly beaten before exchanging a high five. Peppermint Patty was promptly struck down by a golden ring hitting her in the back. Mario jumped back in shock as Peppermint Patty fell to the floor, her clothes returning to normal. He looked over to see Wendy, Iggy and Morton Koopa Jr standing together, grinning maliciously and striking villainous poses. Mario put on a serious face as Peppermint Patty looked herself over, surprised at the return of her normal colourings. She tried to generate a fireball, but found herself unable. Mario helped her up as the three Koopalings charged forward with raised wands. Mario sighed, preparing himself for a tough fight.

While all this went on, Charlie Brown had actually managed to overpower Joe Agate for the moment. After dodging a few dark spheres, Charlie Brown landed an uppercut to Joe's chin, then sent him crashing into the ground with a strong light beam. As Joe tried to get up, Charlie Brown swooped down and delivered blow after blow to the dark warrior, leaving Joe battered and struggling to recover. Charlie Brown just gave his enemy a stern look.

"I've had enough, we're going to finish this now Joe. Give up" Charlie Brown said in what he thought was a threatening tone. Joe glowered at him, before spotting something over Charlie Brown's shoulder that made him chuckle. Charlie Brown frowned curiously, then felt a sharp pain in his back that brought him to his knees. With a cough, Charlie Brown looked over his shoulder to see Larry Koopa, who had just hit him with a magic bolt, and Lemmy Koopa riding atop his rubber ball, which he had evidently re-inflated. Charlie Brown gaped at the Koopalings before muttering a single "Good grief" The youngest Koopaling and the most immature Koopaling laughed in unison as Larry shot a magical blue flame at Charlie Brown, who set up a light shield to block it. Before he could make another move Charlie Brown was kicked in the back by Joe Agate, sending him flying forward. Charlie Brown was then run over as Lemmy sped over him with his rubber ball, an act which proved surprisingly painful.

Peeling himself off the ground, Charlie Brown weakly looked around to see his three opponents ganging up on him. With a gulp, Charlie Brown realized he just might be in trouble.

"Duck Snoopy!"

Heeding Sally's warning call, Snoopy ducked to avoid a magic bolt from Ludwig's wand, but still feel victim to a punch in the face from the kooky haired koopa. Ludwig laughed spitefully at the beagles pain. Then suddenly he felt a tap on his foot, he looked down to see Woodstock kicking him repeatedly, trying to defend his friend. With a devious smile, Ludwig snatched up the tiny bird and held him up to

his face. Woodstock struggled to break free as Ludwig opened his mouth wide, clearly with the intention to devour Woodstock. The poor bird cried out in fright as Ludwig brought him into his open mouth. Ludwig bit down... only to bite his own teeth. Covering his mouth and muffling in pain at his now broken fangs, Ludwig saw Sally standing in front of him, having snatched Woodstock out of his hands.

Sally glared at the Koopa boy, poking him in both eyes "Now where do you get off, picking on a small little bird, you bully!" She then proceeded to kick Ludwig in the shin. The eldest Koopaling hopped around in pain for a minute, uttering a few good swears before regaining his footing and glowering at Sally.

"Why you little-" Steam shooting out of his nostrils, Ludwig raised his wand and prepared to strike Sally when Yoshi's tongue suddenly shot forward and pulled Sally out of the way to safety. Yoshi wagged his fingers at Sally and made a few serious squeaky sounds.

"Yoshi's right Sally, it's not smart trying to pick a fight with someone more powerful than you when you have no fighting experience" Luigi said, in the middle of grappling with Roy Koopa. The pink faced Koopaling managed to overpower Luigi and held him to the floor, pulling one hand free and punching the plumber in the face. Feeling the blood dripping out of his nose, Luigi used his feet to trip Roy up, rolling on top of the Koopaling Luigi made to headbutt him, leaving Roy dizzy enough for Luigi to get up, throw the Koopaling into his incoming older brother and breath a sigh of relief.

"Boy, I'm-a getting tired" Luigi said as his small group re-joined him. Snoopy pulled a tissue out of the depths of his fur and handed it to Luigi, who took it appreciatively and began wiping the blood from his nose "Seriously though, I think I'm-a starting to get-a worn out. I'm not sure how much longer I can-a keep this up"

"Well you have to keep fighting, these kids are going to kill us otherwise!" Sally said insistently.

"I know, I know" Luigi said dizzily. He looked up to see Roy and Ludwig charging at them again. This time Snoopy slapped on his flying ace helmet and barged forward, actually managing to tackle his way through the Koopaling and leaving them to fall flat on their faces.

Over by the wreckage of the Egg Walker Mk 2, Kamek had just gotten through healing Doctor Eggman, who was on his feet and dusting himself off at the moment.

"Thank you my friend. My own servants could learn a lot from you" Eggman told the old magikoopa, who gave a polite bow.

"You flatter me. Now, is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, no, I'll be fine. Just go do whatever needs to be done" Eggman replied, surveying the fighting. Charlie Brown was backed up into a corner by his three opponents, Mario was fighting both Morton and Iggy Koopa at once while Peppermint Patty was trying, and failing to match up to Wendy 'O Koopa. While straightening his glasses, Eggman couldn't help but give a confident smile.

"You never know, we keep this up and the bad guys just might win for

once" The scientist muttered. Kamek flew off to see where else he was needed while Eggman looked around for one of his fallen guns.

Peppermint Patty was pushed to the ground. Wendy Koopa stood over her, one hand on her hip and the smuggest look possible on her face.

"Boy lady, you stink at fighting" Wendy mocked, laughing a few times before snidely adding "I guess it's only to be expected. My friend Pom Pom says you ugly chicks are always the worst fighters"

Gritting her teeth, Peppermint Patty snarked "In that case, you must be a complete wimp!"

Her face turning red with anger, Wendy made to punch Peppermint Patty. She was able to grab her fist, but was unable to stop Wendy from slapping her in the face with her other hand. Falling on her back, Peppermint Patty was left vulnerable to a barrage of kicks from the koopa girl.

"Lousy... stupid... mousy... retch!" Wendy spat between kicks. Recoiling in pain, Patty managed to roll out of the way from the next attack. Getting up quickly, Patty rammed into Wendy, pushing the Koopaling down and engaging in a savage cat fight.

Mario meanwhile was ducking, jumping and all around dodging a storm of attacks from his two opponents. Morton attacked him with his hammer, while Iggy fired magic bolts wildly from his staff, not even checking where he was aiming. Indeed, a few of his attacks even hit Morton instead of Mario, earning the crazy Koopaling a death glare or two from his big mouthed brother. Leaping back out of the way, Mario avoided another swing from Morton's hammer before rushing forward to deliver a double kick to Morton's chest, sending the burly Koopaling falling back. Picking up Morton's heavy black hammer, Mario saw Iggy charging at him to defend his brother, and took this as the perfect opportunity to smack Iggy in the face with the hammer. Iggy went flying back twenty feet, it was obvious from the way he landed that the kid was out of it.

Mario smirked victoriously... until he saw Kamek hover down over Iggy and begin to heal him. Mario's eyes narrowed. Koopalings he and the others could handle normally, but if Kamek kept healing all the villains then there was no chance he and his friends would be able to win. Mario realized he would have to knock Kamek out-and fast.

Feeling a tap on his shoulder, Mario was surprised as the hammer was yanked out of his hand. Turning around he found himself face to face with a stern faced Morton Koopa.

"This is mine I believe" He said, referring to the hammer, which he then raised in preparation to smash Mario into the ground.

"Yipe!" Mario uttered, jumping back just in time to avoid becoming a pancake. Kicking Morton in the face, Mario began running towards Kamek, only to see that the magikoopa was already flying high into the air on his broomstick, far away from Mario's reach. Iggy Koopa got up from where he had fallen, laughing as he was already healed.

Mario frowned and punched the air. Dang it, he had to figure out a way to bring Kamek back down to earth. But how? How?

"Ow! Hey, let go of my hair you scaly rat!"

Mario turned to see Peppermint Patty pinned down by Wendy, who was pulling on her hair.

"I'll stop pulling once I get a few good tears out of you! Cry for me girl, cry!" Wendy shouted, pulling ever harder. Mario huffed, utterly disgusted as he ran forward and kicked Wendy in the face, detaching her from Peppermint Patty. Wendy rubbed her swollen cheek and glared up at Mario, who glared back.

"I'm normally against hitting ladies. But they again, you're-a anything but a lady, aren't-a you" Mario said, punching Wendy in the face and knocking her down. Noticing the rings on her hands, a lit bulb lit up above Mario's head as he pulled them off. He looked over at Peppermint Patty, who was as bruise as he was "How you doing?"

"Could be better" Patty said, wiping blood off her lips. She saw Mario's worried expression and said "I can still fight"

"Not without a power-up you-a can't. Listen Patty, I admire spirit more than-a anyone, but this is a war zone we're-a in. You're not going to last another-a ten minutes out here in your condition. So either ask-a Luigi for a new power-up, or go guard the princess. Got it" Mario said with utmost authority. Peppermint Patty nodded, considering his commands fair.

"Ok, thanks again" Patty said, running off. Mario watched her leave with much concern. He should have gone with her, but he had work to do. Everyone's lives depended on it. Kicking Wendy down one more time as she tried to get up and attack him, Mario ran to a spot where he could get a good aim at Kamek. Wielding Wendy's twin bracelets, Mario spun around and launched the golden rings into the air. One of the rings sliced it's way through Kamek's broomstick, while the other struck the aging magikooa dead in the face. Mario ran forward to intercept the Magikooa as he fell. Dropping his broom, Kamek managed to regain his balance just before he hit the ground and floated upwards, only to be tackled to the ground as Mario jumped into him and pinned him down. Kamek struggled and glared at Mario.

"So, you want to pick a fight with me Mario? Well, I-"

Mario didn't give him time to talk, he just punched Kamek in the face. Then again, and again and again and once more for good measure. Mario punched Kamek in the face a total of ten times, not stopping until he was satisfied that the magikooa was unconscious. Breathing a heavy sigh, Mario picked up Kamek's wand and threw it across the room, dusting his hands off.

"Well, that-a takes care of one problem..." Mario commented. He then let out a painful exclamation as a green magic bolt shot forward and struck him in the back. Rolling forward, Mario groaned on the floor before sitting up to see Iggy and Morton Koopa standing over him, with Wendy 'O Koopa joining them after retrieving her bracelets. Mario blinked at them, wearily he looked around the room, seeing Charlie Brown get pounded by Joe Agate, Lemmy and Larry Koopa, Luigi

and the rest of the gang struggling against Ludwig and Roy, Eggman pulling a weird looking ray gun out of the fallen egg walker and Bowser rising steadily to his feet.

"...And only-a ten more to go" Mario sighed weakly. Wendy and her brothers made way for their father marched forward.

"Stay clear kids" Bowser instructed his three children, glaring down at Mario with a fire in is eye, a renewed determination to succeed. Bowser growled lowly "He's _mine_"

Charlie Brown shot Lemmy Koopa off of his rubber ball with a light beam, sending the ball bouncing away in the process. Quickly loosing interest in the fight, Lemmy Koopa got up and ran after his favourite play thing. Charlie Brown watched him run off, unknowingly leaving himself vulnerable to a tackle from Larry Koopa. The young Koopaling bonked Charlie Brown on the head several times with his wand before Charlie Brown managed to shake him off and blast the kid away with a light beam. Charlie Brown's moment of peace was short, as Joe flew in an tackled him to the floor, dealing a barrage of dark fisted punches to the poor boy's face. Struggling through the pain, Charlie Brown managed to kick Joe off of him and shot a beam of light at him, but the evil boy turned into a shadow and sunk back into the darkness before any of the light could hurt him. Charlie Brown looked around the area, while the darkness surrounds him, and coating his fists with light. Joe's chuckle echoed, but Charlie Brown couldn't see him.

"'Ole Failure Face can't even save a bunch of walking mushrooms. What makes you think you could be The universe's hero?" Charlie Brown looked around as two shadowy hands shot out of the ground and grabbed at his feet! Charlie Brown blasted them to cause them to dissipate, but then two _more_ hands came at his head! Charlie blasted those away, but MORE and MORE hands appeared. Getting tired, Charlie Brown was grabbed and shaken around by a multitude of shadow hands. Joe then rose up above the boy, his entire body changed into a dark figure. With Charlie Brown in hand(s), he proceeded to try and pull him apart. The screaming Charlie Brown gritted his teeth in-between yells, desperate for a move to ward off shadow Joe.

"GGRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" He screamed, clenching his fists as Joe's white grin was the only light showing from his darkened body. Charlie Brown's fists glowed, Joe's grin drooped as a blinding flash of light was shone directly into his eyes. Charlie Brown dropped down, Joe Agate too shocked to stop him, and rolled away from the darkness. Panting on the ground, Charlie Brown used this moment's safety to catch his breath. He would need it if he was going to stay alive much longer.

The King of the Koopas laughed heartily as he whacked Mario around with his tail. The red plumber managed to somehow grab hold of his tail and grin. "Same as always Bowser..." he said before he began to try and spin him around. However, Dr Eggman came up from behind and zapped Mario in the back with an electricity producing ray gun. Fried to the bone, Mario fell to his knees and let go of Bowser. The King Koopa then grabbed Mario by his legs and began spinning _him_ around.

"HAHAHAHAHA! HOW DOES THIS FEEL, MARIO?! DOESN'T FEEL TOO GOOD WHEN

IT HAPPENS TO YOU, HM?!"

Mario, due to the combination of spinning and the irony of the situation, began to get a little sick in the stomach...

Meanwhile, Peppermint Patty had managed to regroup with Luigi, who was rummaging through the power-up sack. She shook him about. "Luigi, I need more of those power flowers! The powers you gave me ran out!" She panicked, "HURRY! Chuck and Mario need help!"

While dizzy, Luigi could still rummage through the bag... just to find nothing. "Uuuh-oooh...we're-a fresh out! In fact, I'm-a pretty much out of everything" Peppermint Patty went wide-eyed and took a quick glance back at the villains pounding on her friends.

"C'mon, Luigi! You gottta have SOMETHING!" She pleaded to him, desperate for anything, "A boulder suit, an Ice flower, A hammer, a barrel, a plunger to bash over their heads?" Luigi looked up and gave her a glance of "Stereotype much?", causing her to chuckle sheepishly while he continued looking.

"A-HA!" Luigi pulled out a red polka-dotted dingy yellow mushroom with eyes and a white stem that was bigger than most other mushrooms. "This was-a me and Mario's secret weapon. And this is the perfect time to use it. This mushroom turns anyone into a giant, as-a one poor Toad village witnessed. I just have to eat this and it'll change the tide of this ba-WAAAH!"

During his schpiel, Roy Koopa appeared and rammed into Luigi, knocking his mushroom out of his hands.

"OOOH MAMMA MIAAAA!" Luigi exclaimed as he rolled across the floor. He blinked as he noticed the mushroom inching across the floor. Panicking, Luigi pushed himself onto his knees "Somebody-grab that mushroom!"

Luigi quickly wished he had just said nothing, because as soon as he shouted out, everyone in the room stopped what they were doing to look at the yellow mushroom. While the heroes only looked confused, the Koopalings all gained wicked smiles.

Roy grinned as he saw the mushroom, slamming his staff into Luigi's head before running after the mystical fungi. Peppermint Patty saw him coming and held out her foot to trip him up. She was about to go after the mushroom when Wendy Koopa pushed her to the ground. The Koopa girl was about to run after the mushroom herself before Peppermint Patty leaned forward and grabbed Wendy's tail, causing her to fall on her face.

Mario, in spite of his dizziness, saw the mushroom inch closer towards Bowser, who was too busy spinning Mario about to notice. Knowing he couldn't let Bowser or the Koopalings get the mushroom, the red plumber managed to free one of his legs and kick Bowser's hand, making him lose the grip he had on Mario's leg. Mario fell a few feet away from Bowser, he got up to go get the mushroom...but had double vision from the rapid spinning. Poor Mario was seeing THREE mushrooms as he stumbled about.

"Ooooooh..." he groaned...before settling on an ultimatum. "Eeny Meeny Miney-YOU!" He declared before jumping on top of a mushroom...only to

find out it was fake. Shaking his head and holding down the bile, Mario looked over to see Ludwig von Koopa about to munch the mushroom and gain its powers. But at the last second Charlie Brown managed to shoot it away from afar. The light Guardian swooped down... only for Agate to travel as a shadow to the mushroom. Joe grabbed it (before Luigi could dive for it) and looked over it.

"Hmm, a mushroom huh? What does it do?" Joe asked the nearest Koopaling.

"It grows you to the size of a house" Ludwig replied, cackling at the thought. Joe Agate smirked, intrigued by the thought as he casually held Charlie Brown and Luigi back with a dark shield.

"A nasty 'ole mushroom is all I need to turn giant? Heh, ain't this fun storytelling?" Agate floated down and prepared to eat the Mushroom. Suddenly he felt tap on his shoulder, he turned around, only for Peppermint Patty to slug him a mean one across the face! The darkness master fell like a light, his eyes blinking in confusion, as the tomboy stood over him.

"Doesn't feel good, huh Agate, you slimeball?" She declared, cracking her knuckles. Mario called out to Peppermint Patty, saying "WATCH OUT! Get the mushroom!" She turned around to see Larry Koopa chasing the mushroom. The tough girl started to run to Larry, who noticed her out of the corner of his eye. He looked a tad worried that this juggernaut is coming at him.

"Uh-Oh..." Were his last words before she tackled him football style, laying him out flat. A pained moan escaping his lips, Larry raised a finger declaring "I'm alriiight..." before Bowser, Eggman, and the Koopalings trampled him in their chase for the mushroom.

"GET THAT MUSHROOM!" Bowser roared as he chased after that rogue mushroom. Charlie Brown, Sparky, Peppermint Patty, Mario, Snoopy, Woodstock and Luigi regrouped to go after the mushroom before the villains could get it. The team run all around the throne room, climbing over rubble and scrap from Eggman's Egg Walker while the mushroom tends to itself, sliding around without a care. Suddenly, Benny Hill music could be heard. Snoopy stopped for a moment to ponder this, before noticing Iggy standing to the side of him eagerly balancing a radio on his head, clicking his fingers to the tune. With a shrug, Snoopy decided to just go with it and continued the chase.

The Benny Hill chase music played as the two sides ran after both the mushroom and each other. Luigi had the mushroom and ran offscreen...then Ludwig von Koopa ran onscreen with the mushroom with Peppermint Patty chasing him off the screen. Wendy Koopa then ran in, carrying the mushroom while blowing kisses to Charlie Brown. The mushroom came back onscreen with a wide eyed and panicky Luigi, who was running from a wide jawed, ready to snap Morton Koopa. After Luigi ran offscreen, Snoopy ran onscreen from the same side as him, being chased by Dr Eggman. Snoopy suddenly skidded to a halt, jumping up and banging his nose against Eggman's head, prompting the doctor to run screaming off the screen with Snoopy in pursuit. Mario ran onscreen with the mushroom alongside Bowser. Both of them stopped, not aware of the fact they were running side by side. Mario and Bowser look around and sigh a breath of relief before shaking hands. Right as they opened their eyes, Mario and Bowser growled at the

sight of one another and got into a fight cloud that caused the mushroom to fly into the air. Sparky, floating in the air, went to grab it...and it passed right through him.

"Oh, right...curse this ethereal body..." he lamented.

The mushroom fell to the ground as the music came to a close and continued to move, until Yoshi picked it up with his tongue and threw it to Sally.

"I GOT IT!" She excitedly yelled, gaining the attention of the nearby villains. Her big smile then turned into an immediate look of shock and fear as The Koopalings all ran towards her. "YIPE!" She yelped, jumping up on the back of Yoshi. The green dinosaur yelped as he did his best to haul tail. The Koopalings went in pursuit, shooting magic blasts at the pair, and it seemed Yoshi wasn't able to shake them.

Charlie Brown jumped up, "SALLY!" He yelled, only to be tripped up by Joe Agate's shadow hands. Mario and Luigi ran forward to help, only for Bowser to jump forward and sit on the pair of them. The plumbers squirmed beneath the enormous Koopa king, Luigi looked up to see Sally being chased around

"MAMMA MIA! They're-a going to be Koopa soup if somebody doesn't do anything!" Luigi yelled out. Mario tried his best to push Bowser off, but his weakened state from all the fighting left him unable to do much of anything. Peppermint Patty tried to rush to Sally's aid, only for Eggman to pick her up and hold her back.

"Now, now my dear, no need for you to put yourself in the line of fire" The evil doctor said in a parental voice as Peppermint Patty struggled to get free. Seeing that they were the only ones unbound, Snoopy and Woodstock puffed up their chests heroically and marched forward to confront the Koopalings. As they neared Roy Koopa turned his head and growled viciously at them. Jumping in shock, Snoopy and Woodstock backed away slowly. It seemed Sally and Yoshi were on their own.

The younger Brown sibling, trying to duck and dodge the seemingly infinite amount of blasts being hurled at her, was in a state of panic. She held tightly onto Yoshi while the Koopalings ran after her. Suddenly, Morton Koopa appeared before them and headbutted Yoshi in the face, knocking Sally off his back. Lemmy Koopa then landed his ball on Yoshi to keep him pinned down. Yoshi let out a pained "YOSHI!" while Iggy, Morton, Roy, Ludwig, Wendy, and Larry surrounded the girl.

"Hand over the mushroom, girl..." Roy said, readying his wand. Sally began to sweat bullets as she looked around to see no one to help. Realizing she had no other options, Sally then opened her mouth really wide...

...and swallowed the mushroom whole. The entire room went wide eyed as Sally blinked a few times, not sure what she should expect to happen. Suddenly, her body began to rumble, and next thing she knew Sally began to grow, and grow, and GROW until she was high enough to touch the ceiling.

"Ooooooh my..." Luigi said as Mario looked on in shock. Bowser's jaw

dropped along with Eggman's. Snoopy whistled impressively as Woodstock rubbed his eyes to determine if what he was seeing was real. The Koopalings all looked up at giant Sally, frozen in fear. The girl looked at herself, smirking widely.

The Koopalings wasted no time hightailing it out of there!

"Next time you want something, call Bowser Jr.!" Larry exclaimed to his dad as all seven Koopalings ran out the door into the hallway.

Bowser watched as his kids left. Looking back to Sally he was met with her giant fist, punching him into a wall. Bowser just about managed to peel himself off before losing consciousness. Eggman tried to make a run for it, but Sally grabbed the scientist and threw him into another wall, knocking him out too. Kamek suddenly walked back onto the scene, rubbing his sore head and clearly having only just recovered from his previous beating. "So... what did I miss?" Kamek asked. He then noticed Sally's giant hand next to him, and the magikoopa was instantly flicked across the room, knocking him out again.

Joe Agate looked on in fear as giant Sally made her way towards him. Too stubborn to go down without a fight, Agate covered his hands in darkness and fired two dark beams at her face. First looking terrified, Sally quickly began to giggle.

"Hey, that tickles" Sally chuckled. Joe gaped at Sally, hurling several ineffective dark spheres at her as Sally reached down and grabbed him. He was not pleased.

"Get offa me, ya broad!" He yelled, "YOU'LL REGRET IT!"

Sally took offense to his words.

"I am not BROAD! I am pleasantly THIN!" She exclaimed before throwing Joe into the air and PUNTING HIM. Joe could be heard screaming as he went crashing through the roof, disappearing into the distance. The heroes and Peach all looked on, very shocked...but very pleased. Peppermint Patty crossed her arms and smiled.

"Now that was a punt! You could learn a thing or two from 'er, Chuck." She smarmily suggested with a toothy grin in Chuck's face. Charlie Brown just groaned. "Good Grief, Peppermint Patty, not now..."

Sally looked around and enjoyed the view from her height. "Y'know...I really could get used to this! My Sweet Baboo would love me as a giant!" But as she said this, Sally began to quickly shrink down to normal size. Once again surveying her now normal surroundings at her regular height, Sally frowned and clenched her fists, just letting out a frustrated, "Rats!"

Mario dusted himself off and said to Sally, "Giant mushroom powers are only-a temporary. Sorry, Sally." However Sally just continued to frown.

Everyone grouped back up and just checked to see if everything was okay. Sparky thought that things had turned out pretty well. The princess was saved, Peppermint Patty was found, they beat The Koopa

Family and Eggman, Joe Agate was out of the wa-

"OOOMPH!"

The heroes all twirled around to see Joe Agate, who had landed on the ground a few feet away from them, leaving a big hole in the wall he'd crashed in through. By the look of it, it seemed Sally had kicked him right around the world and back. After processing this, the heroes got into fighting stances, guarding the unpowered women. Joe coughed a few times and painfully raised his head, finding himself surrounded by the heroes. At first he looked nervous... but then a cocky smile spread across his face.

"The Witch gets what the Witch wants..." he said before pulling out a small device with a button. As everyone looked on apprehensively Joe pressed the button, which caused a rumbling in the room, and indeed the whole castle that made everyone tumble about. No one knew what was happening until a hatch opened up in the centre of the throne room, and a large black sphere rose up. There was a timer strapped to the front of the sphere counting down from sixty in glowing red numbers. Joe smiled fiendishly, and Sparky's eyes widen in horror.

"Everyone..." he said, voice trembling, "Run... we have NO TIME. No questions. Just everyone get out of here!"

Mario nodded and looked to Luigi. "Did you-a pack the escape plan?" His brother nodded and pulled out two feathers.

"I-a always come prepared, brother!" The green brother said as he grabbed a feather and activated the power, giving him a yellow cape. Peppermint Patty blinked, she was about to ask why he hadn't brought those up when they were all getting pounded wen Mario grabbed the other feather, gaining his own cape, and holding onto Princess Peach.

"Let's-a GOOO!" He exclaimed before getting a running start and flying out of the hole Sally had earlier made in the roof. Luigi took hold of Snoopy and Woodstock and flew off after his brother. With Sally on his back, Yoshi shot out his tongue and held onto Luigi's foot, hitching a ride with him, giving Luigi a bit of trouble flying in the process. Charlie Brown nodded to Peppermint Patty and flew out while carrying her. Joe Agate watched weakly as they all left, too injured to stop them. Managing a weak, mean grin, Joe Agate fell to the floor and passed out.

The heroes landed outside the boundaries of the castle moments later. Hearing a loud BOOM from behind them, the group turned back to find that a dark dome had surrounded the castle. They all watched in awe as the darkness swirled and flowed around the castle before beginning to contract. When the darkness faded, the castle was gone. The group looked on in shock as Sparky, who flew right after them, held his head low and sighed.

Charlie Brown spoke up, still in shock, "Wha-Wha-What was that?..."

Sparky turned to Charlie Brown, "A Dark Witch specialty. A bomb that suck up the surrounding domains into her own dark realm." He said, shaking his head, "She used them many a time during the previous

war...I assume she's going to use them again for this one..."

The round-headed hero slumps down onto his behind and sat there with a dumbfounded expression, not quite believing everything that had just happened. All around him his friends, family and pet all sat down, needing a moment to calm down after what they had just been through. Our heroes were battered, bruised, emotionally drained and sore all over. But they were alive. And all things considered, they were victorious.

"Well, glad _that's _over" Peppermint Patty sighed, pulling off her sandals to give her feet a rest. Next to her Charlie Brown began looking around at his friends, he should have been relieved that they'd all made it out alive. But in spite of everything, there was still an outstanding problem that was nagging in his mind. Mario's next comment just served to highlight it.

"Well, looks like Bowser and the Koopas are a lost cause" Mario said, staring wistfully towards the area where Bowser's castle once stood. In turn everyone else turned to face it aswell, except Charlie Brown, who drooped his head and stared miserably at the floor. True, they'd saved the day. But now the Dark Empire had a whole army of turtle monsters at their side. They'd accomplished relatively little here, for all their effort they had done little if nothing to halt the progression of the Dark Witch's plans, and with Bowser and his castle sucked into the Realm of Darkness there was no hope of convincing him to turn the Empire down now.

Charlie Brown heaved a heavy sigh of defeat "Typical luck" He muttered, gaining the attention of his group "After all that we failed to make any real difference. Bowser's working for the Dark Witch, which give them a lot more power and influence. All that fighting and we didn't even make a dent in their plans. It figures..."

Mario and Luigi stared sympathetically at their mopey friend and Yoshi cooed sadly. Getting up and patting Charlie Brown's shoulder, Mario put on a warm smile and said "Oh come on Charlie, it's-a not that bad" Charlie Brown gave him an odd look, to which Mario continued "Sure, we didn't stop 'em today, but so what? We'll get plenty of-a chances. The important thing is, the Princess and Peppermint Patty are rescued, and we can all-a go home and say we-a did out best. And hey, you're still coming out of this thing better off. You've-a got me and-a Luigi and Yoshi and the whole Mushroom kingdom backing you guys up now. Together we can-a do anything!"

"Here, here!" Luigi cheered as Yoshi chirruped excitedly. Charlie Brown stared wide eyed at them, then smiled slightly, admiring their spirit. Maybe he should try and look on the bright side. Hey, they were all in one piece after all, that alone was reason to celebrate.

With a warm smile, Princess Peach stood back up and addressed everyone. "Well, what a day this has been. Once again Bowser came back with a new evil plan. And once again, Mario and Luigi saved the day! And this time with a little help." She looked at Charlie Brown, Sally, Peppermint Patty, Woodstock and a proud looking, WWI Flying Ace hat wearing Snoopy and smiled. "I want to say thank you to everyone here. My dearest gratitude for the heroes of another realm

helping The Mario Brothers" Princess Peach then leaned down and kissed Charlie Brown's head. 'Ole Charlie Brown's face went completely red as he chuckled nervously.

Sally then raised her voice. "So what do we do now? We beat Barney the Koopasaur and his Doopalings!" She said, not fully getting their names down "So what comes next?"

Peach turned to Sally and raised a finger while winking to her. "Oh... I have a pretty good suggestion"

* * *

><p>Later on that day, our heroes were sat at the extremely long mahogany table within the dining hall of the Mushroom Castle. Amazingly, Toad, Toadsworth and the repair crew had manage to completely rebuild the castle brick by brick in the time Mario, Charlie Brown and friends had been gone. You'd never have guessed that it had been half torn to pieces just this morning.<p>

At the centre of the dining table sat an extremely large white cake with pink frosting, with candied statues of every one of Peach's rescuers topping the mouth watering marvel of pastry.

Sitting in between her brother and Mario, with Yoshi curled up by her feet underneath the table, Sally stared blankly at the piece of cake on her plate as all around her friends munched away at their own slices.

"So, let me get this straight" She began towards Mario and Luigi "Every other day you two make your way through a whole bunch of kingdoms, fighting turtles, walking mushrooms, and all kinds of weird monsters along the way. You conquer a bunch of castles and risk your life dodging through countless booby traps, including jumping over pits of lava, and storm a castle ruled by an evil fire breathing Koopa, and in the end, this is all you get. Cake to eat?"

"Yep, that's all" Mario replied between bites of his own slice of cake. Sally stared blankly at him for a moment before her face lit up.

"Good deal" She said, happily munching into her cake. She reached for two more pieces, lowering one below the table. Yoshi shot his tongue out and pulled the cake slice into his mouth, licking his lips and looking quite satisfied afterwards.

Around the table, the rest of our heroes ate happily. Luigi was chatting eagerly with Peppermint Patty about the various adventures the group had gotten into on the way to Darkland, he was so eager to talk about his exploits in particular to someone who didn't know what a coward he could be that he ended up choking on a piece of cake that he'd absentmindedly stuffed into his mouth mid-speech, requiring Toad and Toadsworth to run up and give him the Heimlich manuver. Snoopy meanwhile was sitting right in the middle of the table, happily throwing slices of cake into his open mouth as his belly grew bigger with every one he ate. Woodstock rolled his eyes and muttered a joke about Snoopy's weight before pecking into his own slice of cake.

Charlie Brown wiped his mouth clean after finishing his first helping

of cake, glancing across the table to see Wario and Waluigi gratuitously stuffing themselves, hogging almost all the other snacks the Toad's had earlier set out around the table. Charlie Brown stared curiously at them for while before looking to Mario.

"Why are they here again?" He asked. Mario swallowed the cake he was eating to answer.

"The Toads were-a getting tired of chasing them out of-a the pantry, so the princess decided to just invite them in for-a dinner" Mario said, watching Wario dunk a whole bowl of some foreign dip into his mouth. He shook his head.

Charlie Brown looked down at the half-eaten piece of cake on his plate, fiddling with it with his fork. He jumped after feeling a pat on his back.

"Still scare easy, dont'cha?" Peppermint Patty chuckled. Charlie Brown smiled weakly and turned around to face her "Funny how we haven't had a chance to talk yet, huh Chuck? Well, from the way Luigi puts it, you guys sure had quite a lot of fun today. Next time you're bringing me along, alright"

"I don't think that's... um, never mind, you can come" Charlie Brown hastily added. He was going to say it wasn't such a good idea. However, she'd fared pretty good against Bowser. And hey, she was Peppermint Patty, the girl who ran through life with blinders on. He was about as likely to convince her to stay out of trouble as he was to become best friends with Joe Agate.

Peppermint Patty's eternally cheerful smile lightened Charlie Brown's mood a bit as she continued "So, you got Sally and me here, what about the others?"

"Huh" Charlie Brown blinked, for a moment he'd almost forgotten about his other friends. He felt a great sense of guilt wash over himself, what was he doing here eating cake and watching his friends laugh and chat while the rest of his group was scattered around the universe? Patty was still looking at him, so he felt he had to respond "Oh, uh, they're on other worlds. We know where they are, just not... where they are"

Charlie Brown cursed his stupid wording as Peppermint Patty looked at him funny.

"You're sounding a bit like me or Sally" Patty noted.

"I mean, we know what world's they're on, but finding exactly where they are is a lot harder" Charlie Brown quickly corrected himself.

"Oh. Bummer" Peppermint Patty noted, quickly cheering up "But no worry, we'll find them sooner or later"

"You sound so confident" Charlie Brown said, sounding more worrisome than he'd intended to.

"Are you still doubting yourself? Well stop already, just think for a moment Chuck, these last three days alone you've learned to control your powers, beaten the holy heck out of a super powered jerkass,

travelled to another world, fought through a whole army of monsters and rescued me, Sally and even a princess! Trust me Chuck, you're a good guardian" Peppermint Patty sternly pointed out to her friend "And don't worry about everyone else. You've got me helping you track them down now, not to mention Mario and Luigi and all the rest of us. We'll find our friends and beat Agate easy now that we're all together"

Charlie Brown stared dumbfounded at Peppermint Patty for a moment before smiling widely. One of the things he admired about Peppermint Patty was her unwavering confidence, and in this case it was contagious.

"You know something, Patty? I think you might be right" Charlie Brown said. Peppermint Patty laughed.

"Of course I'm right Chuck, when am I wrong?" Peppermint Patty said boastfully.

"The time the teacher asked you what the twenty-first state was, and you said it was Switzerland" Charlie Brown offered. Peppermint Patty gaped at him, and Charlie Brown himself was also caught off guard by his unusually enthusiastic joke making. And then they both burst out laughing at the thought of it.

Smiling and giggling to herself over how much fun everyone seemed to be having, Princess Peach turned to face Sparky, who was floating to the side of her.

"So, is there anything else I should know?" Peach asked, having just spent the last twenty minutes being given a recap on what was going on in the universe. Sparky shook his head.

"I believe I've told you all the necessary information. Now, Mario and Luigi have agreed to help us fight against the Dark Empire, but that alone isn't enough. The times ahead will be difficult, for this kingdom and for the universe. I cannot stress that enough, dear princess. Effective immediately, actions must be taken to ensure the Mushroom Kingdom is protected, and ready to fight in this war" Sparky explain, earning a nod from the princess.

"I've already informed Toadsworth to assemble the royal army, we'll have every able Toad fighting for the Realm of Light. I'm sending out a call to arms to all of our allied kingdoms aswell, and thanks to Mario we have a lot of allies" Princess Peach informed the spirit.

"All well and good" Sparky said with an approving nod "A good start, but we have a long way to go. Bowser's alliance with the Dark Empire worries me though... we need to act quickly, lest they gain the upper hand"

"Don't worry, everything will be alright" Princess Peach replied. Sparky smiled, admiring her optimism.

Wario gulped down several cups of wine between his oversized helpings of cake, loudly and obnoxiously demanding the Toads waiting on him for more. He looked across the table to Mario, who had just been talking to him.

"So, let me get this straight. You guys are-a fighting a war of universal proportions, against an evil giant Witch and an army of-a monsters made outta darkness... and you want-a me and Waluigi's help fighting it?" Wario questioned.

"That's right" Mario said with a nod. Wario and Waluigi exchanged suspicious looks and glared at Mario.

"What's-a in it for us?" Waluigi asked. Mario shrugged sheepishly.

"A sense of-a pride knowing you're-a helping to save the universe?" Mario suggested.

"Pass" Wario said, munching into a chicken wing. Mario frowned at him and tried to think of a good argument.

"Oh well, too bad" Sally spoke up. Mario turned to her, and even Wario and Waluigi listened in to what she had to say "Guess they're not interested in traveling to interesting worlds full of wonders never before seen by the likes of us. I guess we'll just have to keep whatever wonderful treasures we find on the way all to ourselves"

At the word treasures the Wario brothers instantly perked up. Looking at each other, the brothers exchanged excited glances and Waluigi had to work very hard to hold in a loud squeal. Managing to compose himself, Wario turned to face Mario.

"On-a second thought, count us in. If-a the universe needs us, it's-a only right that we-a help" Wario said nobly. He quickly dropped the honourable façade to exchange an excited high five with Waluigi, and the duo began dancing about in a ridiculous manner.

Mario turned to Sally with an impressed smirk.

"Sly. Very sly" He complimented. Sally smiled.

"What can I say, I'm very good at heckling" Sally said, examining her fingernails. Mario raised an eyebrow.

"I think-a you mean haggling" Mario corrected, and Sally rolled her eyes. Their attention, along with everyone else along the dining table, was caught when Princess Peach began tapping a glass of red juice with her spoon. Satisfied with the reaction, the Princess began to speak.

"I propose a toast, to the brave heroes who rescued me" Peach announced, raising her glass. Smiles all around, the others raised their glasses in unison as Peach called out "To Mario and Luigi, our kingdom's finest heroes. To Charlie Brown, the noble Guardian. To Snoopy and Woodstock, his lovable pets. To Sally, brave and headstrong. To Yoshi, the noblest of steeds. And to Peppermint Patty, our new honorary princess"

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?" Peppermint Patty whispered, though more playfully than irritated.

"To all of you, I owe my thanks, the entire Mushroom Kingdom owes you thanks. May you triumph over the forces of darkness, and may we all be friends forever!"

_ "Here, here!"_ Snoopy called, clapping loudly as he took the first sip of his drink, followed by everyone else.

Sparky smiled as he looked down on everyone. So far so good. They'd recovered two of Charlie Brown's friends, gotten two of the universes greatest heroes to join their side, along with Wario and Waluigi, and they could now look towards uniting the armies of the Mushroom World to defend against invasions from the heartless or Bowser's forces. True, this was only the beginning of their work. But it was a very good one as far as he was concerned.

* * *

><p>"So, you lost?"<p>

Within the Realm of Darkness, in the space where once there was nothing but infinite blackness, Bowser's castle now stood dimly in place, lit only by the torches across it's various rooms. Within the crumbling throne room of the castle, the Dark Witch floated around, glancing down at her high ranking servants, Joe Agate, Doctor Eggman, Bowser and Thibault, who was just there because he considered himself important enough. The Koopalings had been sent back to their rooms by their father, in case they fell victim to the Witches wrath. Though such a fear appeared unfounded, as the Witch seemed quite calm and collected considering they had completely failed to accomplish much of anything during their visit to the Mushroom World. This actually served to unnerve the others a lot more than if she had been shouting at them.

"Unfortunately yes, my lady" Eggman bowed solemnly. The Dark Witch sighed heavily, leaning over and placing a hand again the stairway. Her servants watched hesitantly as she did so.

"Wait, aren't you going to scream at us for screwing up like you did before?" Thibault suddenly spoke up, earning an elbow to his stomach courtesy of Joe.

"Oh no, I'm in a much more collected mood this time around" The Witch replied, floating down and hovering between the villains like mist "True, we didn't kill Charlie Brown, and we retained no hostages. But at least this time you actually did a few things right. You got the koopas to fight for us, that gives us a more substantial army, one we can send back and forth between worlds in the Realm of Light freely as they are it's natural inhabitants. My dear heartless can only break through the barriers into the realm in small numbers, but with the koopas we're free to attack as much as we want. Plus, you brought back this nice comfy castle for us all to live in. Not bad, not bad at all"

The villains exchanged hopeful looks, relieved they weren't going to get zapped by lightning or anything.

"War is never won in a day, my friends. There are going to be plenty more setbacks, but as long as we keep moving forward and follow through with our plans and strategies, we're sure to triumph eventually. For now let's just look at the positive outcomes of this little endeavour and prepare for future conquests" The Witch said. She stopped suddenly when she noticed the grouchy look on Bowser's face "Something wrong dear?"

Bowser looked at her with a stern face, puffing smoke from his nostrils in a disgruntled way.

"You people promised me that if I agreed to work with you, you'd help me beat Mario. I fought side by side with your minions here, and I still lost" Bowser said plainly. The Witch stroked his shoulder.

"A minor setback, my reptilian friend. The heroes got the better of us this time, but that's fine. The universe wasn't made in a day-it took about seven, I believe. Just have a bit of patience, sooner or later Mario will fall, and it will be by your hand" The Witch said. Bowser looked at the scaly, shadowy hand on his shoulder and huffed.

"Yeah, well, patience ain't never been my strong suit" Bowser replied. The Witch smiled a sickening smile and leaned in right up to his face.

"Tough" She said simply, pulling away and floating once more about the room. Bowser stared after her for a moment then looked away, shoulders crossed.

A moment later Kamek entered the room through the main doors, making his presence known through a loud cough.

"The Koopalings aren't taking their evening nap, sire. Oh, and those children you presented me with, my lady, they've been taken to suitable accommodations" Kamek informed them. The Witch looked pleased.

"Well good. I was getting tired of those brats complaining that they didn't have any beds to sleep in. We must find a use for them sooner or later" The Witch mused. She looked down at Dr Eggman and Joe.

"Well, get some rest for a moment. As soon as you're able Ivo I wish for you to depart for your world" She informed her first servant.

"My world?" Eggman wondered.

"Of course, I want you to gather up as much of your equipment from as many of your surviving bases as possible. We'll probably have need of it. Take Bowser with you, in case you run into the military making a raid or anything" The Witch informed him.

"Hardly necessary, my security systems would take care of any threats" Eggman boasted. The Witch shrugged.

"Better to be safe than sorry. As for you Joseph, I want you to go to Mobius as well. Not with Ivo and Bowser though, I want you to track down the doctor's arch rival, the super fast hedgehog called Sonic. You know, before the heroes can recruit him. I sense one of Charlie Brown's friends has ended up there, so the young Guardian won't be too long before going there"

"So, you want me to kill this Sonic guy, and if possible find whichever of Charlie Brown's friends is there I'm guessing. Sounds easy enough" Joe said arrogantly. The Witch shook her head, smiling

all the while.

"Oh, I don't want you to kill him" She said, her smile growing wider and far more wicked as Joe looked up at her questioningly "No... I have a much more sinister plan for him"

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><p>Tiger Lover 16: Well, I must say I'm glad that's finally over and done with. This here was another chapter that took forever to write, and I must say... the results are mixed again. I dunno, after all the build up I just thought this chapter would turn out fabulous when I started writing, but it feels like I only did a good job. I dunno, I'm always critical of my own work, mostly because I'm always worried about what other people will think of it. Hopefully you all enjoyed it, I certainly had fun writing it for the most part. Ok, now onto the trivia:

-While there was a lot going on here, one of the biggest developments in my opinion is the debut of the Koopalings. I have purposely left them out of the previous two chapter's in order to introduce them here. I must say, the Koopalins are some of my favourite Mario characters, and with this chapter they've become some of my favourite characters to write for collectively. They're just really fun to work with. I wish I could have done a bit more with them really, but plot restrictions and stuff forced me to keep their roles simple. I plan to have them appear semi-regularly in future chapters as recurring enemies, so I should get to develop them all later. For their personalities I mix-and matched stuff from the old cartoons and the games. Larry for example is based largely on his Dic cartoon counterpart, Cheatsy Koopa, being that he's a dirty cheater who schemes a lot. Morton Koopa Jr is a chatterbox who never shuts up, to the annoyance of his siblings, also like his cartoon self. Wendy, yeah, also based on her cartoon counterpart. I don't think I got her personality across well, basically I'm going to portray her as a spoiled brat who always thinks she's better than everyone, but also slightly tomboyish and a dangerous opponent in battle, as seen with her fight with Sally. Iggy Koopa is basically insane, which comes more from his games personality. He'll basically be a crazy kid who does weird things like running on the ceiling, though he is also the smartest Koopaling with a knack for inventing. Roy Koopa is a big bully and a tough guy, which is both from the cartoons and certain games. Lemmy Koopa is largely based on his game counterpart, being incredibly childish and more concerned with having fun than being evil, while Ludwig Von Koopa is also based on his game counterpart, being a terrible musician in contrast to his namesake and the most cruel and conniving of the Koopalings. And yes, despite Nintendo's current stance on the matter, the Koopalings are indeed Bowser's children in this continuity. That's just how it's always been to me since I'm a fan of the Mario cartoons.

-Speaking of which, I wanted Bowser to come across as a loving father here. Yeah, he sends his kids out to do battle, but he still really adores them and cheers them on. I imagine that Bowser is a good father, as good as a villain raising his kids to be villains can be anyway. I thought this would add depth to his character, which is a magor goal of my writing of him. More on that later.

-Considering my pointing out a timeline in this chapter, I'm sure you're all wondering, how can the Koopalings still be kids if they've

been around almost twenty nine years? Well, here's my explanation. Koopas are turtle monsters, and turtles live very long lives. So, the way I look at it, Koopas also age a lot slower than humans do. At this point in their development I imagine most of the Koopalings are the koopa equivalent to tweens, being between ten and twelve, with Larry being a bit younger, Ludwig just starting his teen years, and I'd imagine Bowser Jr is still in the toddler stage which is why he's not usually included among the Koopalings, as they don't generally hang around with him because he's so young. I'm not sure my logic applies to actual turtles, it probably doesn't, but the koopas are fictional creatures, so stuff like this is open to interpretation. They all certainly have child-like mentalities.

-One of the things I wanted to do with this chapter is try to explore how Mario and Bowser feel about their hero/villain relationship, which lead to that unfortunately mostly one sided speech describing Bowser's backstory and wish to establish a legacy for himself. A lot of that came from the fact that I wished to make Bowser a more three dimensional character than he's usually seen. I mean, one of the things I love about Bowser is how persistent he is, but after all the times he's failed I'd imagine it's taking a toll on him by now. I wanted to fully justify his reasons for working with the dark empire, because in the games when threats of this magnitude show up he often actually teams up with Mario, if only so he can have the pleasure of beating Mario and taking over himself. He's a selfish character, but not a pure evil person, I wanted to explain that. I'm not sure how well I did, please let me know in your reviews what you think of Bowser's portrayal here.

-The last 3000 words or so of the main scene with the fights, including the chase for the mushroom and Sally turning giant, was Supah-toon's scene for this chapter. It's probably the most words he's written for a chapter for this story. It's also the most heavily edited, which I had to do to make it fit with the rest of the chapter. I very much enjoyed the parts he wrote though, it's mostly the same just more detailed and with a conversation between Charlie Brown and Peppermint Patty was removed because I'd already written one for the cake scene. I considered altering the Benny Hill music chase scene, since it was written like something out of a cartoon and that didn't fit the rest of the chapter, but I found I liked it too much to cut it.

-Luigi's lightning power is an actual ability he learned during the game "Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga" For Gameboy advanced, one of my favourite Mario RPG's. I know it came off as kind of an a## pull considering it had absolutely no set up, but eh, it could have been worse. I could have had him suddenly turn super saiyan and blow the Egg Walker up with a Kamehameha, but obviously I had the sense not to do that. I plan to make lots of references to side games, Luigi's lightning power will come up again later.

**So, finally the Mushroom Kingdom arc is done. The Mushroom Kingdom is on the heroes side, and even Wario and Waluigi are getting in on the action. Where will that lead I wonder? Hmm... anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. I think that I officially crossed 200000 words with this chapter, making this definitely the longest Peanuts categorized fanfic, and the first to cross the 200000 word mark. I'm very happy with that. Next up is the Sonic arc, which will be four chapters but should come together quicker because I know much more certainly what I'm doing for it, whereas with these three chapters I

made a lot of stuff up as I went along. I'll probably take a break from this story though to write the next chapter of my Kingdom Hearts Charlie Brown story with Watanuki-Kun, but I'll be back as soon as I can. Now that the first crossover arc is over things should really get interesting. Well, that's all for now, have a good day folks.**

End
file.